THE TRUSTY SERVANT

G. V. McFADDEN

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THE TRUSTY SERVANT

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HONEST LAWYER

HIS GRACE OF GRUB STREET

THE PREVENTIVE MAN

THE BODLEY HEAD

THE TRUSTY SERVANT

BY G. V. McFADDEN

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PART I

WHAT HE FORGOT

THE TRUSTY SERVANT

I

THE TRANTER'S FARE

AT the close of a heavy lowering day in early June, Barjona Furmedge was waiting before the *White Hart* at Dorchester. In the roadway stood his covered-in cart, but with the tail-board let down, as though the tranter was not yet ready to start on the homeward journey.

The inn stood at the precise spot where the town ended and the country began, so that as Furmedge faced the open door he had upon his left hand the long vista of the High Street, intersected midway by a narrower thoroughfare, and thus arbitrarily divided into East and West, and upon his other hand the shadowy outlines of trees and hedges. From the rural side arose the faint perfume of rain-washed meadows and the soft fluting of a distant blackbird. The townward vicinity gave forth more tokens of life than was usual at this hour.

To the waiting man came sounds of late continued mirth from other taverns beside the one which had supplied his solitary mug of home-brewed, and heavy footfalls rang noisily, or stumbled with suggestive uncertainty along the street. Now and again an unspringed waggon or a lighter wheeled cart clattered past him and so out into the gathering obscurity of the country beyond. Voices, strident or hoarse, according to the distance which separated them from the silent tranter, broke upon his ear without stirring him to any fresh action.

As the moments slipped by, the man simply waited, sometimes throwing a glance at the company within the inn, sometimes taking a turn up and down in the roadway, but more often standing beneath the shadow of his cart with his back to the town and his eyes on the darkening meadows beyond.

Early in the day a thunderstorm of unusual violence had broken over the town. The palpable effects of this had lasted until long after noon, and, although at sunset the heavy masses of cloud had broken up and a pale yellow radiance had hung over the town to the west, the atmospheric conditions continued stormy and threatening. Even the tavern jollity failed to disperse the air of brooding melancholy that descended with the night.

Lights shone out. The dusk was coming down rapidly. The pleasant humidity of the adjacent meadow air became dank and penetrating. Insentient things took on that degree of mystery which gives a subtle sense of personality to what is otherwise inconspicuous and commonplace. The river, which had merely gurgled in the daytime, now gave forth little sobbing moans as it fretted its way beneath the neighbouring bridge; the trees became spectral in the half-light—a night-bird, flapping heavily across the roadway towards the open country, became a bird of ill-omen, foreboding disaster.

Presently the passers-by on foot and in lumbering vehicles became fewer, and then ceased altogether. One or two of them, recognizing the waiting man by the faint light from the inn door, threw him a curious question in jolting by, but Furmedge merely answered with some good-humoured pleasantry, and beyond lighting his own lantern made no preparation for immediate departure.

"'Tesn't like Barjona to bide so late herealong," commented one to a jogging neighbour as they crossed the bridge.

"Ah! . . . 'tesn't, 'tes trew. But a-many queer sights ha' bin witnessed to-day, a' reckon, an' woone mwore or less won't dra' tears from angels' eyes."

After affixing the light to the shaft of his cart, Furmedge did not return to his old position, but remained at the horse's head, his own raised alertly, his eyes peering into the gloom. At the other end of the town the sound of some light wheeled vehicle broke the silence. Calculating the distance with the nicety of long familiarity, the tranter knew that it had stopped at the *King's Arms*, some quarter of a mile away. Then the circumstance ceased to interest him. The larger inn was a posting house of importance on the Exeter road, and received its travellers at all hours of the twenty-four.

Five minutes later, footsteps rang out sharply. Some one was coming down the street at a rapid pace, which increased to a run within a few yards of the waiting man. Then a voice

called to him, and turning slowly he saw a dark figure bearing down upon him out of the shadows.

"Is that Tranter Furmedge?"

"Tranter Furmedge it be," responded the owner of the name. "What med I do for 'ee, sir?"

The stranger made no immediate reply. Passing in front of the other, he leant against the shaft of the cart, well out of the dim rays of the lantern, and continued so to lean, with laboured breath, for several minutes.

"Well, sir, if there ben't naught as I can do, an' seein' as 'tes nigh on nine o'clock——"

"I know, I know," interrupted the other with querulous excitement. "I'm as aware of the lateness of the hour as you are, my man. And I'm in a hurry, too, for that matter."

He broke off, gasping, but whether through the speed of his coming or because of some hidden emotion only a more perceptive man than the one before him could have determined.

"So it do seem, sir," said Furmedge, innocent of satire.

"Yes." The stranger, who was completely wrapped in a long black cloak and kept his hat well down over his eyes, seemed to pull himself together. His manner became sharp and authoritative. "Yes. You're going to Wool, I understand."

"'Tes so, your honour."

"Don't call me that! I'm only a poor traveller who's missed the coach and must needs get on to Wool to-night."

"Missed the coach, sir?" repeated the other in some perplexity. "But——"

"Yes, yes, yes, I know! You're wasting time. Why don't you start?"

"Ah!" Furmedge spoke now with the satisfied air of a man who feels firm footing at last. "You'll be wanten a lift 'tes so."

"Good God! haven't I told you so? Are you quite a fool? Why else should I be dawdling about here?"

"Why, that, sir, is what your honour knows best. But there now, don't 'ee fret thyself. I'll be off so soon as I've a-got what I be waiten for."

"Waiting? I tell you I can't wait. 'Tis a matter of life and death, I say."

"Ah!" The tranter sucked in his lips significantly, and made a futile effort to see his companion's face. "Life an' death, says you? There's bin too much o' that here a'ready to-day, to my pore way o' thinken."

" What do you mean ? "

" Well, sir, seein' as ye've but jes' coome, 'tes neither here nor there, an' I reckon we'll say no mwore about it."

With which ambiguous reply Barjona Furmedge turned away and busied himself with an unnecessary overhauling of buckles and traces.

" Good God," cried the excited man at his elbow, " you'll drive me back to the inn ! "

" Nay, nay," the other replied imperturbably, " I'll drive you to Wool in less than five minutes from now. But wait I must until—ah ! they be coomen at last."

" Who are coming ? "

The silence that followed the startled question—for the countryman made no reply—was broken fitfully by the sound of irregular footfalls, coming apparently from behind the inn. Still without speaking, Barjona Furmedge moved to the horse's head, and proceeded to back the cart in the direction of the oncoming footsteps. The swaying tail-board made a clicking sound in the quiet air. Before the owners of the footsteps had advanced near enough to attach themselves definitely to the little group formed by the vehicle and its attendants, the tranter spoke over his shoulder to his agitated companion :

" Best get up-along, sir. I'll be wi' you in a minute."

The other complied without further questioning, and settled himself in the corner farthest away from the lantern. From his position it was now impossible for him to watch his companion, or to witness anything of whatever took place at the rear of the cart, the weather-stained covering of which fell curtainwise behind him. When the men spoke it was in low whispers, and as his momentary suspicion had been allayed he was not greatly concerned with the nature of the new-comers' errand. He sat in his dark corner, fingering the reins nervously, and trembling slightly beneath his heavy wrappings in spite of the close atmosphere of the evening.

In a minute or so he felt the floor of the vehicle begin to shake, and realized with half a mind—for his thoughts were occupied with his own concerns—that a heavy burden of some sort was being placed inside the body of the cart. The voices rose at the same moment.

" Woone—two—dree ! In with en ! "

" Stiddy, lads ! And do 'ee spake wi' mwore reverence o' such gear."

" He he—don't make no manner o' difference, I reckon ! "

" Well ! " This after a pause, broken only by heavy breathings and innumerable creakings of the ancient cart. " 'Tes done, an' a sweaty job at best. I wish 'Jona jaÿ o' his goods this neäght ! "

" Leave that to me, naybores," the tranter's genial tones struck in. And the man in front heard the sound of the tail-board being fixed in its place. " I ben't afeard o' what the Lard hev set His seal on, whether here or there. An' so, frien's and naybores, I'll be aff now, or us won't get to Meäster's Crumpler's afore next Sunday."

The last words had caused a considerable change in both the physical and mental attitude of the stranger. When Furmedge climbed up into his seat and fumbled about in the darkness for the reins he found his companion leaning forward out of the shadows, eager as ever, but less cautious about exposing his person.

" Did I hear you say that you are going to Mr. Crumpler's ? " he demanded, his face gleaming pallidly and his eyes glittering.

The other hesitated. He chirruped to the horse, and turned the cart before replying.

" I've to call at Meäster Crumpler's, sir, if that's what you wants to know."

" Mr. Crumpler of Bindon ? "

" Over to the Tower, sir. Was you wanten him ? "

The stranger shrank back into the shadows.

" I ? " he said in a strangely startled way. " Oh, no. I've no business with him. I've heard the name, that's all. And happening to have an appointment—that is a—a——"

He broke off nervously and left the sentence unfinished. Barjona Furmedge, being the least curious man in the county, merely nodded his head, shook the reins, and murmured :

" Jus' so, sir."

But presently his tongue relaxed. The cart was now well away from the town, jogging rhythmically along beneath a dark sky, and traversing a rough highroad between tall hedges of hawthorn and bramble. From the branches of the trees which here and there broke the lines of the hedgerows there fell now and again heavy drops of moisture—the residuum of the rainstorm that had deluged town and country-side earlier in the day. When one of these fell with a dull *plash* upon the covering of the cart,

the sensitive nerves of the passenger responded with odd jerks and spasms which a more smoothly travelling vehicle would have rendered perceptible to the man at his side. Beyond these intermittent sounds and the creaking of the cart itself, nothing disturbed the stillness, which in its essence was peculiarly heavy and brooding. The impression given by the unmitigated darkness overhead and the warm breathless air was that the storm had not yet exhausted itself, but was regaining energy for another outburst at an unexpected moment. From the roadway arose the pleasant aroma of dust recently saturated by rain.

The rural mind in its slow grasp and leisurely rumination is apt to hold on to a mental connection long after a brisker intelligence has broken away from a given subject. It was nearly twenty minutes after the stranger had given his hesitating denial of any business with Mr. Crumpler of the Tower that Furmedge made his next comment on the subject.

" A queer sart o' wold gentleman a' be too," he remarked.

" He ? Whom are you talking of ? " asked his companion irritably.

" O' Meäster Crumpler, sir. Oh, ay—so queer a man as I ever did see. Yet a girt clever jenus I hear tell. They say he can make a human feäce out o' a bit o' clay so easy as us common sart can roll snowballs."

" Indeed ! "

" So as we be proud to hev him for naybore. Ever seen the girt tall tower he've a-built in the Abbey grounds ? "

" No. I'm a stranger to these parts, I tell you."

" Thee doesn't say ! Now, I'd ha' sworn ye was a Do'set man from your spach."

" That's your mistake, my man. What were you saying about Mr. Crumpler ? "

" Ah, to be sure. A rare clever bit he be. Set up a reg'lar Tower o' Babel, he hev. An' in it they do say he makes arl manner o' wondrous images ; not but what 'tes a idolatrous callen, an' wi'out doubt unacceptible to A'mighty God."

" Fools' talk ! You mean the man's a sculptor."

" That's it, your honour. A sculpsit a' calls himself. He chips 'em out o' girt blocks o' stwone, so cunning as never was. Why, he made them fine bustës they calls 'em up to parish church. There's some as do say he've a-sold himself to the devil for skill to wrought in such onlikely stuff, but I never pay no heed to such onreasonable talk, it standen to natur', I do say,

as the Lard ben't a-goen to let the devil hev things his own way coome Trump o' Doom an' Judgment Day."

"A true saying, indeed. Can't you drive on faster? The storm may break out again at any moment. Is Mr. Crumpler at the Tower now?"

"Certain sure. He bides to hwome, coome sun, coome rain, so wrapped up in's work a' be."

"And you have, I understand, a package to deliver to him to-night?"

"'Tes so, your worship."

"Of some weight and size, I gather?"

The tranter turned slowly, and eyed his shadowy companion.

"Med I ask why you says that, sir?"

"For no particular reason," the other replied uneasily. Adding after a pause, "Are the gates closed at night?"

"As a rule they be," was the cautious answer.

"But not this evening?"

"Well, you see, sir, seein' as I've to take the cart nigh up to the house I reckon Meäster Crumpler'll leave the way clear for I."

"Does he live alone?"

"Quite alwone, sir."

The stranger sat back, and once again silence fell between the two men. A more astute mind than that of Barjona Furmedge might have busied itself with seeking to discover whither this questioning on the part of the stranger trended. But the worthy-souled tranter concerned himself little with the things of this world, beyond taking a kindly interest in his neighbours, and giving of his best service to his employers. Apparently, also, his companion had learned all that he wished to know, and had small interest in his informer himself. He leant back, more composed than formerly, wrapped up in his cloak, so still and silent that Furmedge, glancing at him from time to time, concluded that he had fallen asleep.

In this way several miles were traversed, the countryman now and again breaking out into the subdued humming of a Wesleyan hymn. The night continued fine though starless, and as the hour grew later a perceptible freshness permeated the air. The jogging horse quickened his pace, stimulated either by this sudden coolness or by the near approach to home.

All at once the driver, who had allowed the reins to lie upon

the animal's neck for the last half-hour, tightened his hold and sat up.

" Gee whoa, Dobbin ! Stiddy, wold bwoy ! Easy, easy."

The caution came in time—no more. The animal, alarmed by an unexpected movement in the roadway, threw up his head uneasily, but feeling the firm grip on the reins subsided, quivering. Out of the darkness a figure emerged. A face, indistinct and sexless, was upturned to the men in the cart.

II

THE WOMAN IN THE ROAD

"IS that Tranter Furmedge?"

The voice was a woman's, and as she spoke she slipped a little nearer. The pale rays of the lantern glanced upon the folds of a dark-coloured cardinal and on an ungloved hand.

"Who be'st?" the tranter asked, bending down a little.

"Ah, it is you! You know me, Furmedge, well enough."

"Oh, to be sure! 'Tes Mrs. Summerhayes, ben't it?"

"Yes."

A touch fell on the tranter's arm. The stranger's hot breath swept his cheek.

"A curse on your delays!" was whispered in his ear. "What's the meaning of this?"

The woman in the roadway caught the muttered inquiry, and her next remark was made indirectly to the stranger.

"I won't keep you a minute, Furmedge," she said, and hesitated.

"What can I do for 'ee, ma'am?" asked the man who sat above her.

"You've come from Dorchester, haven't you?"

"Straight as the roads let me, ma'am."

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was less an articulate word than a sigh. After emitting it the woman remained silent for so long that Furmedge himself showed signs of a genial impatience.

"Was you wanten to ask me aught else, Mrs. Summerhayes, ma'am?"

"Yes. You were at Dorchester to-day; tell me—the hanging, did it take place?"

"It did, ma'am. God ha' marcy on a pore sinner."

The answer was barely given when into the night air there burst a curious sound. The woman was laughing. And the

laugh was of so extraordinary a quality that the two men in the cart were affected by it each in his own degree. There was derision in it—a grim kind of mockery, spiced with a bitterness that in its turn was not without a certain reckless defiance. It lasted for no longer than a couple of seconds, and ended as abruptly as it had begun, making a ghastly stab of sound in the silence which preceded and closed upon it to the listening ears.

Barjona Furmedge was genuinely shocked. While his expostulations hung on his lips, the quicker speech of his companion flared out. But it appeared to be impelled less by a sense of decency than by the girding of his nerves at so jarring a sound.

"For God's sake, madam," he cried, "don't do that!"

"Nay, ma'am," the tranter struck in, "'tes a pore sart o' jest for a feymale to laugh at!"

"You're wrong," the woman retorted with a show of spirit. "I didn't laugh because Demetrius Jordan has been hanged, but because you called him a sinner. I swear to God," she went on with added passion, "that if word or deed of mine could have saved that young man, he would not have gone to the gallows to-day!"

"I ask pardon o' the Lard," the tranter rejoined humbly. "Maybe I've no right to judge o' the young chap. Sinners arl us be, to be sure; an' maybe he wa'n't no warse nor the rest o' us. 'Tes a young feller as were hung to-day back along in the town for murder, as Mrs. Summerhayes be a-talken o', sir."

"I know, I know," responded the other, with his rapid articulation. "I've read the case. Murdered his friend, didn't he, and destroyed the body in a kiln?"

"Ay, sir," Furmedge acquiesced gloomily.

"A villainous affair——" the stranger was beginning, when Mrs. Summerhayes' cool clear voice again struck in.

"I hoped there would have been a reprieve," she said. "I prayed all night that it would come. It was expected, I think?"

She threw the question across the countryman to his companion. The indefinable sympathy of class with class led her to ignore her homely acquaintance, for, though this woman stood between the two, there was a bias towards the more cultivated personality.

The answer was calculated to throw her back upon herself. It came with an unpleasant sharpness.

"Indeed, ma'am," the man cried, "I heard nothing of it.

Why, in God's name, should not a scoundrel who deserves to die fulfil his sentence ? "

In the gloom they saw her raise her head and endeavour to look more closely at the speaker.

" Perhaps only one person could tell you that, sir," she answered coldly.

" Ah ! You think he was not guilty ? "

" I did not follow the trial very closely," she answered.

" Yet," cried the man with exasperation, " you appear to be extremely interested ! "

" With the issue, as worked out to-day—yes," she said.

And he could imagine her cold smile in the darkness. But her meaning she kept to herself.

" He deserved his fate," the man in the cart persisted. " If ever a hardened young scoundrel merited death, it was he."

" You speak with feeling, sir," retorted Mrs. Summerhayes. " Perhaps you were a friend of his—victim ? "

" I ? No, no. I speak merely as an outsider—as any man of principle is bound to do in judging of such a monstrous crime. Murder in the heat of sudden passion I can in some measure understand. But the after-action of the criminal was essentially cold-blooded and revolting. I repeat, he deserved to die."

" Well, well," replied the woman, after a slight pause, during which she might have been weighing the other's words, or merely smiling at his vehemence—even detecting in it some note of insincerity, " you may rest easy, sir, since it seems that he is dead."

" Ay," muttered the tranter sympathetically, " dead enough, pore chap. An' must ha' suffered a tar'ble lot afore he were turned aff at last."

" How ? Suffered more than most ? " Mrs. Summerhayes cried eagerly, and the man at Furmedge's elbow leant forward to listen.

" I'm afeard so, ma'am. You see, there's bin girt doings down to Do'chester to-day. His Glorious Majesty the Prince—God save the King !—hev bin a-visiten hereabouts ; not that arl his mighty men o' valour be spread abroad, so to tell, over the feäce o' the land, for he be a-travellen private like, same as you or me. 'Tes put about by wicked tongues as he be a-pursuen o' a sartin lady, an' haven missed his fair she, he were journeyen down-along to the West—'tes what they do tell."

" But what in the name of mercy has all this to do with Demetrius Jordan ? " cried the woman in the road.

" Ma'am, I be a-coomen to that. Whoa, Dobbin ! Stiddy, wold bwoy ! Well, the hangen were fixed for eight o'clock i' the marnen, and the folk foregathered at daybreak, same as usual, an' by six the booths was arl set up, an' the fair arl ready. Well, then the story coome along as how the Prince were faren theäse way, an' the Governor o' the gaol an' the Sheriffs laid their headpieces together, an' said as how 'twouldn't do for his R'yal Highness to clap eyes on a dead man a-hangen for his misdeeds the very instant a' got into the town."

" What did they do, then ? "

It was the male listener who put the question. The woman stood motionless, her hands clasped beneath her cloak, her pale, upturned face striking more vividly on the vision of the two men now that their eyes had become accustomed to the focus.

" Well, sir, they marched the pore lad—for he wa'n't no mwore—back to lock an' ward again."

" Ah ! They'd started, then ? "

" Jus' on their way to the gallus, sir, when word about the Prince coome in."

" Well ? "

Again it was the man : the woman caught her breath at the horror of that prolonged agony. Barjona took up his tale. A kindly hearted fellow, he told the story without any morbid gusto or sham sentiment.

" Well, sir, they waited an' waited an' never a sign o' the gentry, neyther tap nor tail of 'em. Then coome the starm—tar'ble bad over to Do'chester it were. An' arl the time the folk were waiten, not knowen if the hangen were to coome aff or no. So it went on till nigh on four o'clock an' then 'twere said as how the Prince weren't likely to coome then. So 'twas out wi' the young chap again, so as to get it over an' let the folk vamp hwome to their teas."

" Yes, yes ! Dear God, how slow you are ! "

This from Mrs. Summerhayes.

" Nay, ma'am," expostulated the narrator, " you wouldn't ha' me tell such a melancholy tale in a hop-skip-an'-a-jump, an' kiss-your-sweetheart-under-the-mistletoe fashion, would'ee ? Well, they took en out for the second time, an' as I'm a liven sinner they hadn't hardly got the rope round his neck when the

word gooes by as the Prince and arl his r'yal train be a-headen for the town so hard as they can goo."

He paused, but this time neither of his listeners spoke.

" So ye med reckon my gentlemen was in a fine fix. 'Twas the very thing they'd bin tryen to dodge, an' here 'twas coome upon 'em like Crack o' Doom. Well, they put their heads together once mwore, an' arl the time here was the r'yal party a-hurryen an' a-gallopen, an' not a minute to be lost. Howsomever, there wa'n't naught for it but to cut en down so quick as they could an' stow en out o' sight out o' hand. Which was done. An' a' reckon there must ha' bin a rare lot o' cussen an' blasphemen over the job, eh, sir ? "

" No doubt, no doubt ! But what delayed the Regent ?—or rather, why did he come at the last ? Had he any knowledge of the execution ? " asked the stranger in reply.

" Well, your honour, I did hear as 'twere the starm kep' him back. An' as to his knowen 'twas a hang-day, seems to I they'd never ha'bin so fair put to it if they'd knowed he knowed."

The questioner received this piece of rustic logic without comment. In truth, having got as it were to the kernel of the story his interest appeared to evaporate. He stirred impatiently when the woman began speaking again.

" How he must have suffered ! " she cried softly. " A double agony—God help him ! Had he been three times the sinner he was, surely he had expiated his crimes this day ! "

" Since you seem to believe it, madam," retorted the other, " I sincerely hope that the young man, wherever he is now, is able to appreciate your sympathy. But, if you have nothing else to ask of Furmedge, perhaps you will have no objection to allowing us to proceed on our way."

Mrs. Summerhayes stood back, and answered him from a point which reduced her to a mere voice in the darkness.

" Your pardon, sir," she said with a kind of careless contempt that well matched with his barely concealed insolence, " I am sorry to have detained you. I had hoped that the young man might be spared, you see."

" Spared ? To commit further wickedness ? I thank God there was never any chance of that ! . . . What's the matter now ? "

For the man at his side had turned suddenly and sat so, with his head held at an angle listening.

" Seemed as I heard a noise 'ithin," he muttered uneasily.

" Rats, perhaps. Here, take the lantern and look."

As he spoke, the traveller made to pull aside the hangings that shut them off from the interior of the cart, but Furmedge stopped him with a hasty:

" Nay, nay, sir, let a' bide ! Hist ! Shoo ! " With a stamp on the footboard. " Well, good night to 'ee, Mrs. Summerhayes, ma'am. Us must be getten on."

The woman stepped still farther back into the hedge.

" Good night," she answered. " Yes, go on. You're more than usually late as it is."

" I'd to wait for a package for the wold gentleman down yonder," explained the tranter, as he gathered up the slack reins and set the horse in motion.

" Who is she ? " asked the stranger when the woman had been left some yards behind.

" As onfort'nate creatur' as do breathe," Furmedge reported sympathetically. " Ten year back she were so dandy an' sprack a maid as a man med see. Annabella Kellaway she were then. Her feyther, he farmed his own land, an' were a deal thought on too. A fine God-fearen man, an' little worthy o' the troubles as beset en. 'Twas debts here, an' mortgages there. Then Miss Annabella fled from hwome, an' Farmer Kellaway he got wolder an' greyer until he dropped into's grave, so pore as a church mouse. There wa'n't naught left."

" And his daughter has returned, it seems."

" Ah, pore thing, she hev."

" Not married, of course ? "

" Well, sir, folks talked a bit, natur'ly. But I don't pay no heed to such idle scandals. An', as Mrs. Summerhayes, Miss Annabella do hold her head so high as afore she went away. 'Tes a sad true tale, for there ben't no manner o' doubt but what she've suffered crewel. Arl her fair looks gone, an' arl her pretty lightsome ways a-fled. A lwonesome 'oman she do pass her days, a-gazen at the broad acres as ought to be hern, an' ben't."

" A dismal ending, truly," commented the listener, and fell once more into the silence which had held him before the woman's appearance.

She had stopped the cart at the junction of two roads near to the village of Wool. Of these, the vehicle had taken the narrower and was now moving along what was little more than a lane, bounded by high hedgerows on one side and on the other by

the broad meadowlands over which the tranter supposed the erstwhile Annabella Kellaway's eyes to brood longingly. At the end of less than a mile the lane split itself into two, and here Furmedge checked his horse with a smothered exclamation.

"Lard love me, what a stunpoll I be!" he cried. "If I han't bin an' brought 'ee straight down to the Abbey itself, an' you in no ways wishful to coome so fur."

His companion roused himself, and peered out. Heavy gloom closed round them, most of all directly in front, for there a small wood or plantation of trees appeared to block the way. In the momentary pause the hissing of a sluice could be heard near at hand.

"Where are we, then?" demanded the traveller abruptly.

"Nigh on the Abbey, sir."

"The Abbey?"

"Bindon Abbey, your honour. Where the wold sculpsit bides."

"Ah! But I thought you said he lived in a tower."

"So a' do. The Tower's inside. The Abbey be naught but girt stwones a-fallen down."

"Ruins, you mean."

"Ay, sir. An' as even Meäster Crumpler can't bide among such ramshackly gear, he've a-built himself a house alongside. Prop'ly spaken, the tower be stuck a-tap on an' han't got no roof to en."

"The Abbey is behind those trees, I suppose?"

"'Tes so, sir. Right to Abbey, left to Mill. Now, where can I set 'ee down?"

The stranger appeared to consider.

"You've brought me out of my way," he said. "I don't want to be set down here at all; not at this hour, at any rate. My business must wait till to-morrow now. I couldn't possibly find my friend's house in the dark. See here, my man! You're going on to this Mr. Crumpler's?"

"'Ees, sir."

"Very well. I'll wait for you, and go back to the village."

"But, sir, Meäster Crumpler don't never allow strangers—beggen your honour's pard'n—inside the gates."

"I'm not proposing to go inside the grounds, my man," the other returned with unnoticed asperity. "I'll wait here. Better still, I'll walk on, and you can pick me up nearer the village. I shall hear you coming."

" Very good, sir."

The matter being so arranged, the traveller alighted, dropped behind, and watched the cart swerve to the right along the belt of trees, and disappear in the darkness.

When the sound of its creaking had considerably diminished, Sir John Trehane, Secretary of State for Home Affairs, went cautiously forward and followed it.

III

NIGHT

AFTER proceeding along the branching road for a few yards, Trehane caught the glimmer of a white gate to the left. To this he turned, still maintaining the caution that had brought him so far, and entered the Abbey grounds.

Once inside, he paused, peering round in the gloom, which seemed even deeper here than elsewhere, for some evidence of his recent companion. As far as seeing went, he might have stepped into an underground cavern, and he was unable to decide in which direction the house probably lay. Advancing slowly, and guiding himself by the rough stones beneath his feet, his quick ear caught at length the subdued sound of Barjona Furmedge calling to the horse. Trehane, aware that detection now would give rise to infinitely more comment than an overt arrival would have done, shrank into the undergrowth that bordered the roadway. After a few moments of cramped silence he began to move forward again.

Before long an indistinct greyish mass detached itself from the gloom and appeared, nebulous and aerial, at no great distance from him. From its height and bulk Trehane at first took it to be a portico attached to the main building. If so, what had become of the cart? He put the question anxiously before proceeding another step. Then, from somewhere on his left, came the noise of a jingling bridle. Furmedge, then, had gone round to the back of the house. Since the owner lived alone, there could be no fear of untimely discovery while the old man was engaged at the rear.

But a closer investigation told Trehane that he had not as yet reached the house itself. Standing beneath the dominating pile of masonry, he found it to be composed of rough-faced blocks of stone, rising to a height far above his head, and terminating on the one side in what was obviously an unpierced wall. Running

his hand over the surface in the other direction, his fingers touched a smoother superficies, and then came into contact with innumerable protuberances. He realized that he had discovered a door studded with heavy nails. The truth flashed upon him significantly. He was standing at the ancient gateway of the Abbey; the modern house stood on the farther side of the high wall. As this was his objective, he had very nearly lost his purpose by loitering conjecturally on the debatable ground which lay between the old and the new entrances.

He sprang forward, searching for a means of ingress. His hands suddenly clutched the empty air. The farther side of the double door was half-open, and moved slightly as his weight fell unexpectedly against it. In an instant he had stumbled forward, and found himself within the gatehouse. So far, so good. His primary object was achieved, but all difficulty was not yet at an end. He had still to ascertain the position of the house, and, what might prove even harder, effect an entrance there.

For the next few steps darkness still enveloped him, but when at length his caution brought him from beneath the roof of the gatehouse into the open there were sights and sounds to guide him. Or so he thought at first. But a moment's careful watching only added to his confusion. One thing alone was gained—the situation of the house being sufficiently indicated by the faint glimmer of Furmedge's lantern. But while Trehane looked, the light began to move like a will-o'-the-wisp at a few inches' distance from the ground. Then it again became stationary on a higher level. Furmedge had fixed it to the other end of the cart. There followed the sound of the tail-board being released, and, after a delay of some minutes, the lantern was once more lifted and began to throw its wavering light about as before.

To the impatient watcher this postponement of his own purposes was intolerably irksome, and his annoyance deepened into a more active emotion when he realized that the delay was likely to be of some duration. The light, illuminating now the long grass, now the leathern gaiters that protected the tranter's legs, continued its journey with a precision which clearly indicated a definite object in view. It passed the watching man obliquely at long range, so that to follow it with his eyes he had to make a half turn as he stood. It waned from his sight, at times being obscured altogether by some object that interposed itself across the line of his vision. It was this intermittent

obscuration that explained a point that had previously puzzled him. If, as he conjectured, the purpose of this journey across the Abbey grounds was to bestow in some remote place of safety the goods which Furmedge had conveyed to the old sculptor, the rejection of the cart as a natural mode of transit was now understandable. The ground, broken and littered with breast-high ruins, would render safe progress by such means impossible.

The point was an extremely trivial one, but the determination of it served in some sort to restore balance to a mind abnormally excited, and working at a high rate of pressure. Trehane considered. The package, whatever it might contain—material for the old man's art, probably—was sufficiently heavy to need at least two men to carry it. The Home Secretary recalled the exertions of those who had placed it in the cart. Therefore, it followed that Crumpler himself must be lending a hand in the present removal. The obvious corollary was that at this moment the house was empty.

Acting immediately upon this presumption, Trehane set out in the direction from which the procession had started, and in his stumbling progress soon came upon the cart drawn up on the grass. Rounding its bulk, he found his difficulties so far ended. A light drew him forward ; he mounted a short flight of steps and entered the obscurity of a dimly lit hall.

For the present he was forced to rest content with this achievement. He had secured the entrance at which he had been aiming, and in such a way that there was little danger of his presence being discovered while the sturdy tranter's help was within call. He groped his way to a dark room at the side of the hall, and stood within, listening for the sounds of the two men returning to the house.

He had waited for nearly twenty minutes when signs of their advent caused him to strengthen rather than to relax his attention. He found his way to the window and peered out. Furmedge was replacing the lantern on its nail. The next moment he was clambering up to his seat.

" Good neäght, Meäster Crumpler, sir, an' thank'ee. 'C'lk, Dobbin, wold bwoy ! "

The cart lumbered away and the old man, the owner of the house, turned from bolting and barring the door to find Trehane at his elbow.

There was a moment's silence, then the visitor spoke.

" You know who I am ? " he demanded harshly.

In figure he was many inches taller than the other, and his long black cloak, falling in loose folds around him, added massiveness to a well-turned form—an illusion materially helped by the dim light which rendered each visible to the other, and no more. Yet the older man, who was still further at a disadvantage by reason of his surprise, betrayed neither alarm nor astonishment. Without replying, he reached up a skinny hand to the light, and lifted it to his visitor's face. His own, thus suddenly illumed, showed as the infinitely more composed of the two.

" Well," he croaked, and added a hoarse kind of chuckle. " It's you, is it ? "

" Yes ! Don't say you're surprised to see me——"

" I don't. I'm not. I've been expecting you."

" Ah ! "

Sir John Trehane drew in his breath with a whistling sound. He turned abruptly to the room from which he had emerged.

" Come in here ! " he ordered in the tone of a man accustomed to being obeyed.

Crumpler followed, bringing the lantern with him. Before entering into conversation, he removed the candle from its socket inside the horn casing, and placed it in a stick which was standing ready on the table.

The light revealed an apartment of some size, but bare and disorderly in the extreme. The floor was sparsely covered with the tattered remnants of Oriental rugs, and ragged curtains of the same rich dyes sagged from a cord drawn across the window. This was set slightly open, and through the space came the faint rustling of many leaves stirring in the newly arisen breeze. For at all times whatever wind was abroad might be experienced here, so that the tops of the trees in which the house was embedded would rock rhythmically, when elsewhere scarcely a tremor was to be felt. As a vapour here became a breeze, so, in like manner, a gust became a tempest, and a gale a hurricane. Thus by common consent, and not by choice of the owner, had the place come to be known as the Tower of the Winds. Rarely, in truth, was it undisturbed by the faintly sibilant sound which was now borne in through the window, and fretted to an almost unbearable exasperation the man who now set foot in the house for the first time.

While Crumpler was occupied with the candle, Trehane kept silence, letting his eyes wander over the heterogeneous lumber

that the room contained. Obviously it was the living room of the owner. A small fire was burning in the grate, and the old man's supper was still in a saucepan on one side of the hob. On the other stood a sooty kettle, ready boiling for the small punch-bowl that was waiting, half filled with spirits, on the table. The high oak mantelshelf held *objets d'art*, rare and costly, pipe-lights in an Etruscan vase, a pair of callipers, a loaf of bread, a plaster cast of a foot, and the small wax bust of an antique. The rest of the plenishing afforded as great an admixture of the fine arts and the essential.

By the time that the visitor's eyes had appreciated the various incongruities, old Crumpler was ready for him. He was not an attractive man. Nature had bestowed upon this disciple of Beauty an assortment of features, among which the only point of harmony consisted in an unprepossessing strength and ruggedness. The eyes were too small for the nose, yet they were quick and expressive; the mouth was odd-lipped—the upper one forming as hard and severe a curve as the lower was coarse and loosely hung. The ears had long heavy lobes, but were otherwise little more than mere orifices in a skull which possessed a high forehead and an extraordinarily developed cranium.

For the rest, the figure of the old sculptor was habited in a curious garment, half cloak, half tunic, and not altogether unlike a Roman toga, which fell below his knees, and left exposed a pair of leathern gaiters and clumsy shoes, bespattered with the congealed plaster of his occupation.

With the candlelight falling upon him and his small eyes glittering with malicious amusement, this uncouth genius now turned towards his visitor, and repeated the "Well?" with which he had greeted him.

For answer, Trehane banged his fist down on the table.

"Yes, I'm here," he said. "And you know why I have come."

"No, I don't," the old man asserted stubbornly, his eyes resting appreciatively upon the shapely fist under his eyes. "Lord," he muttered, "what a power of expression about the knuckles!"

The other raised his hand quickly, and shook it before the eyes that had been admiring the firmness of its outline.

"You villain!" stormed the exasperated man. "You damned villain! Do you know what you have done?"

"Lots of things in my time, my friend, seeing that I'm

nearly seventy-two. But the biggest of all isn't done yet. My *magnum opus* is to come."

"Listen to me, you cursed scoundrel!" cried Trehane, his pale face flushed with rage. "Do you know that they hanged a man at Dorchester to-day?"

"Only one? They'm getting humane. Used to string 'em up by the dozen when I was a lad. Hang-fairs were worth losing a night's sleep for in those days. Many's the time——"

"Oh, God, be silent! Did you or did you not know it?"

"Perhaps I did; perhaps I didn't. What then?"

The cool insolence of the elder man, as he stood with his hands thrust into invisible pockets and gave back stare for stare, drove Trehane to a kind of subdued frenzy.

"What then?" he repeated. "This: that man's death, innocent or guilty, lies at your door. Is that a thought to reconcile you to your unspeakable conduct of three days ago? Or does the fact penetrate even your hide and convict you of the outrageous act which you committed in my office when you took the liberty of presenting yourself there against my wish and countenance?"

"Not so fast, by your leave, dear brother-in-law, not so fast! Let's begin at the beginning, if you please. A man's been hanged, you say. What's that to me?"

"More than you apparently realize! God above, don't you understand the truth? That paper which you stole from my——"

"Hold hard, brother-in-law, 'stole' is a strong word."

"Not too strong for the deed! I repeat it—you stole a paper from my private room, where you had no right to be for a single instant. You must have entered it with felonious intention. And of all the papers upon which you could lay your wicked hands you must needs pick out one the loss of which, if the fact becomes known, must inevitably prove my ruin!"

Once more the clenched fist came down violently on the table, and the candle flame leapt at the impact. But now the old sculptor's narrowed gaze remained fixed on the fiery eyes that glared at him across the wavering light. A sardonic smile broke the hard line of his mouth.

"Oho," he said, "now we're getting at it! Your ruin! I thought all this spouting and mad to-do was on account of the young feller who was hanged to-day."

A slow flush dyed the Home Secretary's face, and for a brief

moment his eyes fell. For the first time since the beginning of the interview he seemed discomfited.

"Of course, of course," he said then, with some show of irritation. "A man's life is a serious thing——"

"But the reputation of John Trehane more important still, he he!"

"Silence! By the verdict of his countrymen the man should have died. But it pleased the authorities to be merciful. The paper you abstracted, wilfully and of malice prepense, was a reprieve of this man's life, and, because it failed to reach its destination in due course, the sentence was put into execution, and a soul sent to its Maker before its time. For the safety of that paper and for its arrival at Dorchester before the execution, I was responsible. I, and I alone, will be held to blame, if the facts ever become known. God help me, I say, if the affair should come to the Prime Minister's ears! I have too many enemies in the Cabinet, and too few friends at Court, to be able to help myself in such a case!"

"He he!" croaked the old man, gurgling with malicious pleasure. "The more fool you not to look after your trust better."

"Damn you!" cried Trehane. "D'ye think I'll be brought to book by you, after your criminal part in the affair? Give me back that paper at once—at once, I say, or you'll regret it before you're many hours older!"

Crumpler met the implied threat with the coolness of conscious immunity.

"Why, what be going to do?" he demanded, turning aside to draw a pipe-light from the vase on the shelf, and to search for his churchwarden. "You can't do aught to me without betraying yourself. You're a bigger fool than I think ye, if you can't see that."

Trehane did see it; had seen it all along. It was the weak spot in his position, though he had hoped to bewilder his enemy into failing to appreciate it. He understood now that the old man was not going to trouble to deny the charge, although as yet he had not directly admitted it.

But though the Home Secretary was suffering under the lash of self-condemnation of the serious dereliction of duty of which he had been guilty, he was in no mood to endure the vitriol of the other's tongue being applied to his own burning soreness. No man could reprehend his carelessness more bitterly than he

himself did ; but, for very shame, he was forced to minimize his share before the greater culprit.

" It is a monstrous thing," he broke out, " that I must suffer for your act of vile treachery. You forced yourself into my office on a trivial pretext, and took advantage of a momentary laxity on my part to enter my private room and abstract that paper. Have you anything to say in extenuation of such unwarrantable conduct ? But, good God, what does it matter whether you have or not ? The paper—the paper, man ! Give it back to me this instant. You've done harm enough—incredible, irretrievable harm—by its retention already. Restore it, I say—give it back to me at once ! "

Crumpler, who had seated himself, and was puffing away at his pipe with open enjoyment of the other's distress, looked with a wicked leer.

" And how d'ye know I've got your precious paper now ? Yes ; I did take it. I'm not going to deny it. Why should I ? You can't touch me for the sake of your own tender skin. Well, but how d'ye know I haven't destroyed it already ? "

Trehane's eyes grew eager ; his expression changed swiftly. He leant forward, nascent hope being swept into the certainty of relief even before his trembling lips gasped out the words :

" Have you ? You have ! Your malice, then, was not directed against me personally, but against the unfortunate young man himself ! "

" Steady, brother-in-law, steady ! That's your idea ; not mine. I know naught of the lad, 'cept what every one knows."

" Ah ! " The other fixed his burning black eyes, from which the hope and the relief alike had faded, on his brother-in-law's grinning face. " It was as I thought. You stole that paper to damage me."

Crumpler merely chuckled.

" What have you done with it ? I demand to know ! "

" And that's just what I'm not going to tell you."

" Have you destroyed it ? "

" That's telling ! Come to think of it, 'tisn't very likely I should, since that's the first thing you'd do if you got your hands on it now."

" Then you have not ? "

" Go on guessing, brother-in-law. 'Tis fun to hear you, and I've a deal o' time to spare—if you don't mind my eating my supper while you talk."

"Would to God it would choke you! For the sake of a fancied wrong, a childish spite, are you bent on ruining me? Robert——"

"Don't talk of the past—don't stir up old wrongs. You know well enough I've always hated you. What did you ever do to make me love you? Answer me that, brother-in-law!"

"You talk like a child——"

"Who stole my young sister away just when she was learning to be useful? You did. Who schemed and plotted to deprive me of the money I ought to have had, so that it might swell your coffers, while I was hampered and kept down by the want of it every day? You did. Who kept me from the place I ought to have had years ago—denied my powers himself, and retarded their recognition by others? You did! I ought to have been in the Academy years ago—and look where I am still! Is there any man alive who can model a bust as I can? Why, put to it, I'd turn out work that couldn't be told from Leonardo himself! What commission did you ever get for me—what fame, what honours? When did you ever bring my name forward when titles and ribbons were being flung about? When did you ever ask me to your house to meet the men who'd have recognized my powers and made my name the talk of Europe? No, no. You cherished your hate and left me to rot here—unknown, ill-paid, obscure—happy if I get an order for a church bas-relief, or find myself patted on the back by the scribbler in some wretched county newspaper. And now, when I've got the key in my hand, and can turn it, and make you squirm a bit, you can come whining to me on your knees, and talk of your reputation—your fame, your ruin! No, no. Let your honour be tarnished, and your name forgotten; and learn you to rot in obscurity, as you've made me do—brother-in-law!"

Trehane, who had made several attempts to stem the tirade and been overborne by the old man's vindictive garrulity, had relapsed into a half-contemptuous, half-impatient endurance of the situation. He scarcely followed the unreasonable argument, and was in no mood to confute words that he had endeavoured to refute on paper long ago. Stubborn and eccentric as Robert Crumpler was, it would have needed more than a supposed inveterate enemy to convince him that a seat on the Treasury Bench did not carry with it endless powers of emoluments and recognition of the fine arts. That the imaginary grievance had

borne such bitter fruit was the most forcible of all signs that it was firmly fixed within the old man's mind.

Trehane, therefore, regaining some of his habitual self-control as Crumpler's insolent coolness became a heated vituperation, brought him back sharply to the point at issue.

"Have done!" he said. "Do you mean to restore that paper or not? That, after all, is the matter which has brought me here."

And the other snapped out his answer as firmly:

"Then you can go home again! I'm not going to give it back—now you know!"

Trehane was prepared for the reply, but the blunt words were like a blow in the face. He stiffened his back to meet them, and when they had been given was silent for a moment.

To attempt to soften the old man's rancour, he was bitterly aware, would be like trying to melt a foot of ice by breathing on it. The cards in his own hand were so poor as to be almost valueless. Threats had already been proved useless; there remained only an appeal to reason, and a bribe offered to the sculptor's vanity. This last his own stubbornness kicked against. He decided, hopelessly enough, to try the alternative.

"And what possible value," he asked, "do you place upon this paper if left in your hands? A reprieve which is rendered ineffectual by the death of the man to whom it refers; which as a legal document is incomplete, since it bears no more than the criminal's name and the Royal Signature."

"Ah! I thought it was a queer sort of a deed when I came to look at it, and was half sorry I hadn't grabbed something more important like. How did it come to be left like that, eh?"

"I refuse to enlighten you. Answer my question."

"Oh, you refuse, do you? Very well, brother-in-law—I refuse, too."

"You can't produce it without admitting your theft."

"Ah! There's ways and ways. Perhaps I'm cleverer than you think."

He looked cunning enough to devise plans to overthrow empires as he spoke. Trehane dropped an exasperated oath.

"How much will buy it?" he asked savagely.

"Nothing. I won't sell."

The Home Secretary took a turn round the small room. He crushed down his reluctance, and came to a halt before his

brother-in-law, his face working with distaste for the proposal which he had brought himself to make.

" I am not entirely without influence," he said ; " although it does not carry as far as you seem to imagine. I might be able to bring your work—your genius, before those able to appreciate and to reward it."

For answer the old man laughed sardonically.

" Too late," he growled. " Too late, my fine bird. There's no sense in gathering nuts when all your teeth are gone."

" You appeared to think otherwise just now. After all, fame is a good thing whenever it comes."

" You'm wrong. All the fame of Europe wouldn't give me back the years of disappointment, and struggle, and heart-break that I've had, and that you might have eased a dozen years ago, only you wouldn't. No. I'll not take your favours, John Trehane. 'Twould give me more happiness to see you rotting in a ditch than to be President of the Academy now."

The Home Secretary drew back under the rebuff, hiding his smart as best he could. But his face was flushed with anger, and hope was nearly dead within him. One other thing he had to offer—a mere trifle in comparison with the favours that Crumpler had flung back in his face a moment since.

" My daughter," he said slowly. " You wished her to sit to you. I refused my consent. If I alter my mind and agree to let her come——"

He watched the grizzled head come up inch by inch, and bore the fire of the cunning eyes for a moment of silence. Then Crumpler spoke.

" Now you're talking sense," he said. " Now you speak like a man o' understanding. Let the jade come, and perhaps I'll think it over ; perhaps . . . perhaps. We'll see."

The two men looked at one another keenly, suspiciously. In that moment of sharp scrutiny neither was quite honest. Each had a secret motive working at the back of his mind ; each intended, if possible, to outwit the other. And each, aware of his own dishonesty, was seeking it in his companion. But neither gave a sign, and the glances fell apart in silence as they had met.

IV

THE DEVIL'S TRIO

TREHANE had already turned away, and was groping his way out into the dark passage when the necessity of asking a last favour of his surly host occurred to him.

"Give me a light as far as the gateway!" he said ungraciously, with a half glance over his shoulder.

The old man chuckled.

"Reckon you got in somehow," was his reply. "You'd best get out the same way. If you can't find your horse, you must tramp it."

"I have no horse," Trehane explained. "I only ask——"

"No horse! Then how the devil did you get here?"

"Furmedge gave me a lift from Dorchester." The Home Secretary gave the reply as reluctantly as if it involved the betrayal of a State secret. "He happened to be detained in the town——"

"He he he!"

"And when I learned this, I got him to bring me over instead of waiting while the post-horses were changed."

The slight inaccuracy passed unchallenged. Not a desire to save time, but the anxiety not to be recognized in his native town while on so delicate an errand, had led him to choose the less conspicuous mode of travelling. The temporary presence of the Regent in the vicinity had, in his opinion, added considerably to his danger. For where Royalty went, there, so his highly strung imagination argued, were his political enemies bound to be gathered together. When the facts came out, and he was forced to make the best defence he could, the less connection he had with the Assize town, the better for his reputation. Hence his extreme caution throughout the whole affair.

Crumpler appeared to accept without question the simple statement which the other had given. His face was enigmatic

as he stared fixedly at his companion, and slow chuckles of inward amusement alone broke its impassivity. At length he said :

" Barjona brought you along, did he ? "

" I have told you so. What amuses you ? "

" Nothing, nothing, brother-in-law. Huh huh huh ! To think of that, now ! Barjona to fetch you here ! "

" And why not ? " Trehane's racked nerves were getting the better of his tact again. " The man was coming this way."

" Oh, yes. He was comin' this way right enough. To think of it, though. You and I and he—what a devil's trio, he he ! "

Crumpler continued to ramble on with half-articulated sentences, interrupted by his own inexplicable merriment, until Trehane, exasperated beyond endurance, seized him roughly by the shoulders, and demanded an explanation with some show of determination to get it. Whereupon, the sculptor straightened his back, and stretched out a lean hand for the candle.

Thinking that the spasmodic mirth had its origin solely in a half-cracked brain and that Crumpler was about to comply with his request for a light, Trehane fell into moody silence while the other fixed the candle into the lantern and hooked his finger through the ring.

" Come along," said the old man shortly, and led the way to the door of the house.

Outside a pall of darkness had descended, thick and velvety, and of so palpable a quality that it struck the mouth and cheek like the blow from a soft glove. The light of the lantern was too thin and poor to do more than afford the vaguest of guidance to one unfamiliar with the place. The soughing of the incessant wind deepened the air of melancholy and mystery which stagnated over the impenetrable vastness of the demesne. A superstitious man might have hesitated to follow in the wake of the dancing jack-o'-lantern ; a timid one would have insisted upon knowing more of the locality. Trehane, for all the defects of his temperament, had no lack of physical courage, and, like most independent natures, despised a terror that had its roots in the imagination alone. He followed his companion without a word.

Presently his easy confidence wavered a little. They had already covered, as he judged, enough ground to have brought them to the confines of the place. Yet no gateway loomed, pale and gigantic, through the gloom ahead of them, and the old man went on, moving unerringly over the broken ground. Trehane,

who, recollecting the comparative smoothness of his first passage, had set out with a certain carelessness of step, now began frequently to stumble and to bruise himself against fallen blocks of masonry. At first he concluded that the sculptor was leading him circuitously to the outer gateway, but it was gradually borne in upon him that they were proceeding in a totally different direction.

While he was turning this over in his mind, Crumpler's voice struck into the silence.

"Have a care!" he cried. "Water!"

Trehane advanced with extra caution, cursing under his breath, and, still following the wavering gleam, presently found his feet upon a wooden plank. To negotiate such a passage in the dark was not without peril, and, halting, he called to his guide to come back. The lantern descried a semicircle and returned.

"Why have you brought me here?" Trehane demanded angrily. "This is not the way to the road. I refuse to accompany you any farther."

"Then mayst find your way out as best ye can!" retorted the old man with savage pleasantry. "I can get back to the house in the dark."

As this was probably true, and as Trehane had no mind to be left stranded in such a hopeless and dangerous position as that suggested by the sculptor's words, he cursed his rising temper, and merely requested the clutch of the other's hand in crossing the narrow bridge. Crumpler complied, and in this way both men reached the opposite bank in safety.

"What now?" asked the Home Secretary, as their hands fell apart.

Crumpler made no reply. He continued his walk for a short distance, then raised his lantern and waited. Trehane joined him, his resentment being for the time overshadowed by a natural curiosity.

He found that they were standing in a narrow passage, the sides of which appeared to be composed of solid earth, the distance between them being no more than sufficient for the progress of a single person. A few feet farther on, the passage opened out abruptly, and Trehane stepped into an enclosed space, vague and cavernous, which, although he had been conscious of no downward gradient on entering, had all the attributes of an underground cave.

The air was close and dry, the walls, revealed by the flickering light, were of stone, the floor was of stamped earth. What the dimensions of the place were it was impossible to tell, but every footstep struck hollow on the motionless air. Mystery, uncertain and unpleasant, was the one idea conveyed by this singular cell-like apartment. To speak in whispers was a sympathetic instinct; to move warily, a physical precaution. Sir John Trehane observed both particulars.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he asked, his anger chilled into mere haughtiness by the forbidding atmosphere of the place.

But even as he spoke a solution occurred to him. It seemed to account for all the inexplicable details of the journey from Dorchester, and for his brother-in-law's determination to bring him to this spot.

"You have contraband goods concealed here," he said with the sternness due to his high Government position. "And the man Furmedge is aiding and abetting you."

Anger rose hot within him. Not so much on account of the nefarious practice itself as because the old man had the insolence to flaunt it in his face.

"You scoundrel!" he broke out, with a kind of subdued ferocity. "You think I'm afraid of you! You think I dare not denounce you because of my own skin! But, on my soul, you shall pay for such insolence!"

"Bide a bit before you boast," retorted the sculptor with less animosity than might have been expected. "Come here!"

The old man had walked some few paces farther into the cavern, and at his word Trehane followed him.

"Got another bit o' candle about me," Crumpler muttered, busy with his lantern. "Here! Take that! Now, what do you see?"

He had thrust a fragment of taper into the hand of the Home Secretary, who, now raising it simultaneously with the old man's light, looked, and let the candle fall with a cry of horror.

A face had appeared out of the darkness—a man's face, upturned at a lower level than his own. And the sight of that face was such that, in this gloomy vault, it might well have been supposed to have been conjured up by the necromancing arts of the old man who exposed it with a kind of diabolical satisfaction to his shrinking companion.

The face was of a deathly pallor, and the features, admirably

modelled by Nature and shaded by a thick mass of hair of lightish hue, had been twisted out of their contours by some spasm of physical or mental agony. Nor was this in itself the utmost horror of the sight. It was the immutability of the expression that shocked and appalled, for it carried with it but one awful significance—Death.

Trehane's voice sank to a whisper even lower than before as he stammered out :

" Good God, who—what is this ? "

Crumpler's hand clutched his arm. He shook it off hastily. The thought, not unnatural in the circumstances, which had sprung into his mind was a disquieting one taken in conjunction with the lonely place and abnormal surroundings. Was this old man at his side a murderous maniac gloating insanely over his victim ? He recovered his own mental balance at this suggestion of personal danger, and faced his brother-in-law sternly.

" Who is it ? " he asked again.

" Who ? Why, your fellow-traveller, to be sure ! Didn't I say we'd make a devil's trio ? "

" My fellow-traveller ! Good God, man, do you mean to say that I rode to-night with—that ? "

Crumpler nodded, his eyes full of malicious enjoyment of the surprise which he had arranged for his visitor.

With some reluctance, yet drawn thither magnet-wise, Trehane's gaze fell again upon the white contorted face. His own sanity had returned ; he dismissed his former notion as a chimera, but another dread was bearing down upon him. His own cheek was a trifle pale as he put the question for the third time.

" Who is it ? "

" Who ? Jigger me ! Don't you know ? Don't you understand ? It's him."

" He ? Who ? "

" You'm a fool ! " Crumpler retorted with contempt. " Look ye here, man, look ye here ! "

With one hand he pulled aside the already loosened shirt, and with the other thrust the light forward so that it illumined the shapely column of the throat.

It was ringed round with a red mark of the width of a man's thumb, which spread into a wider patch under the left ear.

V

DAWN

TWICE Trehane attempted to speak, and each time the effort ended in an ineffectual gurgle. He remained staring down at the colourless face with its fixed expression of agony, and he found some strange fascination in the sight of so much beauty thus inexorably struck awry.

As the tranter had said, the owner of that tortured face could have been little more than a youth when the hangman's rope had caught him in its grim embrace, and, even now, some grace of innocence still clung to the distorted features. Trehane's mind followed two processes simultaneously, each moving independently of the other. With his deeper inward penetration he was recalling the circumstances of the crime for which the young man had suffered ; and at the same time his fancy was engaged in smoothing out those lines of anguish and straightening each feature into its natural position.

The result, when he had arrived at it and realized what he had been doing, was singularly unpleasant ; even—so much of personal sympathy had he unconsciously brought to bear upon the experiment—disconcerting and jarring in the extreme. For it brought him face to face with the conception of a countenance of singular attractiveness, allied to an unusually cold-blooded crime.

The double-barrelled fact came to him with the force of a confirmation of the doubt already in his mind—a doubt which, in spite of his laboured assertions of the prisoner's guilt to Mrs. Summerhayes, had influenced him to grant the final measure of mercy to the accused.

Then his own conscience awoke with a painful start. But for that culpable negligence of his, this young man would never have been hurled violently into eternity, never have been called upon to endure that double agony of which Barjona Furmedge

had told, and which cried aloud even now in the twisted lines of the mouth and brows.

He bent a little lower, his own nerves twitching violently, moved on a sudden wave of sympathy; for this poor racked image of a man, made in the likeness of his Creator, was, to a degree that it irked Trehane to reflect upon, his own victim, and had suffered a prolonged agony that the law had neither decreed nor desired.

"Huh huh!" croaked the old man at his side, "han't ye done staring at him yet? What d'ye think of him? A beauty, isn't he?"

Trehane turned sharply on the speaker. There was, in this unusual place, something peculiarly ghoulish about the figure of the sculptor as he, too, hung over the bench whereon the body of the young man had been laid. Crumpler had suspended the lantern on a nail affixed to the wall, and was running his fingers appreciatively over the immobile features.

"Good God!" cried the younger man, "can you bear to look at him—to touch him—to have him here, knowing the infamous part you have played in his death?"

"That's naught to do with me," retorted Crumpler with callous imperturbability. "He was sentenced to death."

"Yes. But he was reprieved afterwards."

"Ha! How are you going to prove that, eh? Think our Prinny'll remember signing that paper? Well, well, maybe he will when he sees it again."

"Damn you, keep quiet! I say your bitter vindictiveness has cost this young man his life."

"Well, I'm not sorry. For two reasons. First, he deserved to die, didn't he? And second, I want him."

"Want him? God above!—why?"

The sculptor's hands fluttered out again, hovering here and there in the light and shade, moving with delicate caressing touches about the forehead and throat, tracing the lines of the finely modelled ear; coming lower down, rounding the curve of the shoulder, measuring the narrow hips, smoothing the well-turned limbs, as though, in truth, the substance beneath his touch was the plastic creation of his own design.

Trehane, gathering some notion of his intention from all this, and liking him none the better for it, watched in silence, aversion rising more strongly in him at each moment.

"A fair beauty he be," muttered the old man. "Not a

blemish in him ; girth and length exact as they should be. To think that I should ha' had to wait for the gallus to drop me just the fruit I wanted."

" You have had him brought here for——"

" My work," said Crumpler with an odd kind of dignity. " 'Tis the face I want in the main——"

" The face—that ? "

" Ay, ay. For my St. Stephen. Oh, a beauty, a rare beauty, 'tis. I coveted him the instant I saw him. For five years or more I've haunted the Court House every 'Size time, looking for a likely head, and when I saw this I knew I'd found it. Ah, when your fine set-up gentlemen of the Academy, and your critics and lords of patrons—damn 'em one and all !—see what I'll make of that, they'll bite their nails and turn green with envy, some of 'em, and t'others will run to tell the world how there's a man down in Dorset who's been neglected and cramped and kept back out of spite and malice all these years, that can show 'em modern work as good as their Elgin Marbles, and da Vincis and Angelos—and better ! Yes, by God, and better ! "

The old man's voice had risen to a thin shriek ; he flung up his arms and shook his clenched fists in the air. Standing there, amid the weird surroundings, his red toga-like garment falling about him, his long wiry hair framing a face revivified by the enthusiasm of his genius, all the petty meanness and callousness of which he had shown himself capable was caught up and merged into the passionate belief in his own powers which was at once the strength and the weakness of the man. Had Trehane known nothing of the stolen reprieve, he would have acquitted the artist of any indecency in the matter, and would have accepted the pitiful object lying before them as a justifiable means to the end of a great achievement.

As it was, he resented the impression, and allowed a full wave of abhorrence and disgust to sweep the feeling aside.

" Thank God I'm not a genius, nor think myself one ! " he said with a wholesome acerbity that at once lowered the temper of the other's exultation. " Was this thing done deliberately ? Answer me."

The old man laughed, and, picking up the sheet of canvas which he had plucked from the body a few minutes before, began to replace it.

" Of course. You don't suppose he came here by chance, do you ? I bought him for five guineas of the Governor of the

Gaol. When I've got the mask done I shall put him to bed in the earth, and I reckon he'll sleep so quiet in Bindon Abbey as in a prison yard. Better, maybe, for he'll lie in holy ground."

"That's not what I mean! The theft, man, the theft! Did you steal the reprieve for this? Did you connive at the young man's death for the sake of your cursed art? If so, good God, you're far worse than I thought you!"

"Your opinion's naught to me, John Trehane," scoffed the sculptor. "But you're wrong, all the same. When I took the paper, d'ye think I'd time to look closely at it, with the chance of you or Silas coming back any moment? D'ye think, if I'd gone to your house, meaning to have got that particular paper, I'd ha' found it lying open on your desk all ready for me, and the room empty as well? Things must fall out very pat for you, brother-in-law, if that's the way your world works."

"Ah! . . . but you knew it in time to have saved his life."

"That's true. But the chance was too good to miss. I wanted him—with the death-agony on that fine young face of his—and I wanted you, to pinch and squeeze, brother-in-law, and that little bit o' paper gave me both wishes at once. Was I likely to be such a fool as to let 'em both go, for the sake of a bit of damned squeamishness? After all, the lad was a murderer, and had earned his deserts."

Trehane, who by this time had seen and heard enough, pulled his cloak round him and turned away. To expect any softening towards himself from a man who had carried an artistic whim to such grim lengths seemed a fool's dream indeed. Repugnance, anger, dejection, all intermingled with his natural pride, sent him away from the spot in moody silence. He groped his way down the narrow passage and into the outer air, where he stood inhaling deep draughts after the close atmosphere of the underground cavern. Presently, for the darkness had lifted a little and the gloom was penetrable now, the old man heard the fall of his feet upon the wooden bridge which spanned the river a few yards away.

Silence then fell upon the dusky vault. The old man, so full of nervous energy still, the young one, so inert and motionless, were alone together.

. . . . . .

Crumpler had rewound the body in the sheet of coarse canvas, and had lifted the light from the nail, when a sudden thought took and held him, making him pause even in the moment of

departure. The face as he had seen it this night was perfect for his purpose. Would it be as perfect on the morrow? Dared he wait till then? This chance, snatched as it were from the unwilling hand of the law, once allowed to slip, could he hope to arrive again at the like? Such a face did not grace the gallows once in a score of years.

He hung on the whim of the moment, irresolute. His artistic perception urged him one way, his reasoning faculties the other. To delay might mean the spoliation of the group on which he had been at work for the last five years, awaiting the ideal model for the central figure. To set to work at once meant working under difficulties, with a possibility of bad craftsmanship—mere waste of time. The surroundings were ill-adapted for his purpose. The light, augmented by any number of candles, would be inefficient and uncertain; he himself was already fatigued with a hard day's work, and further debilitated by the excitement of the interview with Trehane. The implements of his art lay in the lower room of the church-like tower adjoining the dwelling-house. They would have to be fetched across the darkness of the park. Certainly, there was no great difficulty in that. His mind swung round to the artistic poise—with an implied compromise. He decided to fetch the plaster, dispose it as necessary, and, leaving it to set during the night, work at his leisure on the morrow.

With this resolve hot in his mind, he once more uncovered the face now regarded as the mere inanimate model for his matrice. As he looked again at the pallid features, an exclamation of annoyance and alarm broke from him. The expression had already altered. It was less intense, less strained, less poignant—less painful to behold. But, if the subtle change had worked inversely, it could not have created a greater feeling of abhorrence in the man who regarded it than did this unexpected smoothing and softening of the unnatural lines.

He bent over the dishonoured head, snarling viciously, but with fascinated eyes. In the utter silence of the place, and by the flickering rays of the light in his hand, imagination had an easy time. Was it imagination alone that construed that play of freakish light and shadow into twitching muscle and quivering nerve? Lower and lower he bent, his shadow upflung upon the earthy roof of the place, watching, intent and fearless, like some abnormal thing. His own grotesque features grew rigid as those beneath his gaze became momentarily relaxed, so that they

might have been chiselled out of a block of his own marble to form the expression of a mind wrought to an unnatural pitch by the manifestation of some awful phenomenon.

And so he remained motionless, unaiding, a grim satyr of a man, from whose present conception all the inevitable anger and chagrin were driven out, while beneath his eyes darkness trembled into light, the mystery of death became slowly transmuted into the mystery of life, and the inanimate body before him became once more a conscious living soul.

. . . . . .

Dawn came ; dawn, with the clear intense rarefied atmosphere consequent upon a night of storm. Into the vivid greenness dashed across with shaft of yellow light, the old sculptor came out from the underground chamber where, with skill and energy, he had toiled all night at a new craft. A dozen times during those uncertain hours had he fought with death for the possession of the fluttering breath that seemed so fragile a thing on which to hang all the marvellous possibilities of a man's life.

The stress of the night's happenings had seared his features and drawn much of the vital power from his frame. But while the struggle had lasted he had given himself to it whole-heartedly, rejoicing, it might be, in this new work of creation, this new expression of the power of his hand.

Yet, because he was by nature a hard man, narrow of outlook, and greedy of power, it was in no mood of tenderness towards the life which he had saved that he leant against the outer wall of the cavern, and saw the moisture rising in white translucent clouds from dripping bramble and rain-washed masonry. Before him arose the faint murmurous sound of the moving leaves ; behind him he heard the soft regular breathing of a man's natural sleep.

"He'm mine," the sculptor determined within himself. "I bought him. According to the sum of things, he's not alive at all. He'm mine, to do what I like with—to fetch, to carry, to wait, to serve. My servant ; 'tis what he shall be—body and soul, he shall be mine."

. . . . . .

Three weeks later, Demetrius Jordan, as they had named him at his trial, came back into the world again.

By three signs was he set apart from his fellow-men, to be marked and known, even as Cain was known of old.

Upon his light brown hair appeared a patch of white, as

though a hand had been laid upon it, searing its natural tint to this pallid hue. His eyes had in them a look of furtive horror, and from the records of his mind all memory of the past had been blotted out, leaving it clean and innocent as that of a little child.

VI

TREHANE EXPLAINS

AT the time when her father was enduring much anguish of mind consequent upon his prospective disgrace, Josian Trehane might have been best described as a Sleeping Beauty.

This in a comparative sense only, for beautiful in the strict meaning of the word she was not. At this period of her career —neither a very long nor a particularly useful one up to this point—she was a tall, lissom girl, deep-bosomed and straight of limb, who moved with the free gestures of a dairymaid, and carried her head like a young goddess. Capriciousness had seemingly marked her for its own. The whole of her not unattractive person was rife with contrasts. A creamy skin, remarkably fine in texture, gave way at the mouth to lips of an almost startling ruddiness ; a brow classical in its proportions rose pensive-wise above a nose of a frankly English type, narrow-bridged, but ending an eighth of an inch before it should have done so. The eyes were of a pure grey, large and luminous, but less pleasing in their expression than in their hue and contour ; appraising eyes—a little hard and mocking in their gaze, the windows of a still slumbrous soul. On the other hand, her smile was charming, and her laughter a thing to move the sonneteers.

In these days, laughter was her daily food. Yet she was no fool ; the coldly critical eyes answered for that. She made a jest of life because as yet she had not learnt what life is. Experience, the wholesome discipline of a great sorrow or a great joy, had touched her not at all. Her spirit was strong within her, for she had never looked fear in the face. Her emotions slept. Her virtues and faults were no greater nor more extraordinary than those of her neighbours. The strength of her will was untested, for none had yet combated it. Her soul was serene ; no problem vexed her with its insolubility, because she had no knowledge of such. If life held no more than a superficial

interest, she at least was not aware of it. Her scope was limited, but all-sufficient to a young woman to whom a double attendance at church service on a Sunday passed for the only needful expression of a religious sense.

Thus was at this period of her history, Josian Trehane, charming, candid, selfish in an impersonal sense, self-controlled, setting, perhaps, too high a value upon herself, but free from any instinct to barter her wares to the highest bidder. It had been said, in truth, that she would dance at a score of weddings before she tripped it at her own.

To a certain extent her life had been an isolated one. The Home Secretary, following his own ambitions, had found no place in them for the girl-child whose mistake in the matter of sex had never been wholly forgiven her. The early death of his wife had removed all chance of the error being rectified, for John Trehane was too faithful a lover to marry again. Of his daughter he knew very little, suffering her to grow to womanhood in a remote Dorset town, while he pushed his way with a nervous yet vigorous energy every year nearer to the height of his ambition.

Seeing her about this time, she being now come to her twenty-third year, he discovered in her a certain appeal to his own masculinity, and what had been before an act of mere indifference became now some faint reflex of paternal precaution. There were many men, he knew, ready to find attraction in unspoilt hoydenish ways, even though they might be countrified, or to applaud an unsophisticated mind when allied to a charming face and shapely figure. If he had not yet paid his daughter the compliment of arranging for her an advantageous marriage, at least he had no intention of allowing her to fall into the arms of the first fortune-hunting roué who might choose to open them. Josian, therefore, was ordered to remain in the country until her father should have time to attend to her.

Then circumstances, ominous in their potentiality, had forced the girl upon her parent's notice.

The proposition set forth by his brother-in-law, although tacitly acceded to at the time, found, upon deliberation, small favour in Trehane's sight. At the moment, he had built little upon the probability of the old man's keeping to his implied share of the bargain, but had relied rather upon the advantage of having an ally within the enemy's camp. Even so, the more he thought of the chance and the means of effecting it, the less

liking he had for the project. Impossible though it was to believe that the girl would run any actual risk beneath her uncle's roof, there were one or two features about the arrangement which made Trehane pause. The isolated house, the peculiar character of the old sculptor himself, his unusual mode of life—all were sufficient to suggest unforeseen happenings of no pleasant nature. Yet it was not so much these untoward conditions that drove Trehane's decision to and fro, as the grisly recollection of the underground vault and the thought of the newly turned sod over which the innocent Josian's feet would probably tread.

Characteristically, then, it was the nervous dread more than the physical fear from which the Home Secretary shrank on his daughter's behalf. And while he hesitated his own position did not improve.

As yet the affair of the missing reprieve had not come to light. But possibilities were as nightmares to the nerve-racked man. Besides himself, there were three others who should have official knowledge of the document. Trehane sifted the case carefully. The highest in authority was, he decided, the person of least importance in the present issue. His Royal Highness, who had been scarcely sober at the time of signing, might reasonably be supposed to have forgotten all about it. Trehane dismissed him with comparative ease of mind, and next considered the position of the judge who had tried the case.

Here, also, he found tolerably safe footing. His lordship, a grim, morose man, had given his consent to the granting of the reprieve with the greatest unwillingness, yielding to Trehane's arguments only at the eleventh hour. If rumour reached him of the turn events had taken, it required no stretch of the imagination to believe that his lordship would accept the implied compliment that, upon further consideration, the Home Secretary had himself yielded the point to the superiority of the legal mind.

There remained, then, the last and apparently most insignificant member of the triad with whom he had to reckon.

This was his own private secretary, whose dereliction of duty on the fatal day had caused all the mischief.

Trehane had no actual reason for supposing that this young man suspected anything. But as day was added to day, and Crumpler did not strike, the subordinate's presence became a growing torture to the highly strung temperament of his chief. Even his civilities assumed the aspect of sneers in disguise ; his

attention to duty, a subtle satire upon his former neglect; his chance references to legal proceedings, so many threats in disguise.

And the damning point of the whole business was the fact that the young man was no other than Robert Crumpler's stepson—taken into Trehane's office a few years back in the laudable hope of thereby lessening the old man's rancorous complaint that no crumbs had fallen from his brother-in-law's table into his meagre lap.

The plan had failed of its intended effect. So much was evident. Had Trehane been a free agent he would now have dismissed the sulky indolent young fellow, who had never been an acquisition to his staff. But, while his presence was a constant torment to his superior, Trehane was well aware that the least move on his part might be the prelude to his own disgrace and downfall.

He bore with this impossible situation for a month; then made up his mind with characteristic impatience, and posted down to Dorset to interview his daughter.

He found her as usual in the large creeper-covered house at the entrance of Poole High Street—a picturesque domicile built by his father, one of the merchant princes of the town. With its balustraded roof, crest wrought in stone beneath the apex, its rounded portico and impressive flight of steps, it formed a dignified but somewhat ponderous residence for a gay maid of two-and-twenty, who herself possessed neither dignity nor overmuch decorum. For Josian Trehane had ruled her life after her own pleasure, spending much of her time down on the town quay among the collateral descendants of Arripay—and occasionally she talked like them.

If she had reverence for anything under heaven, it was for the grave-eyed and aloof visitor who twice or thrice in a year made her uncomfortable and upset the servants by a short residence among them.

"Thank the Powers," she invariably cried when he took his departure, "that's over! Praise be!"

His coming was usually a decreed and somewhat stately proceeding, entailing much preparation and arrangement. When, therefore, he arrived without forewarning in the early hours of a July day, travelling in a hired post-chaise instead of in his own coach and four, Josian rejoiced at the unwonted simplicity, and ran to meet him without changing her gown. But, as he rose

upon her headlong entrance, the sight of his pale face checked her exuberance, and modulated her step. She advanced, wonderment on her fresh young face, and took his gravely bestowed kiss in silence. When she sat down at his bidding she remembered to cross her feet instead of her knees, and said nothing until he spoke.

" You didn't expect me again so soon, I suppose," Trehane said.

" No, sir."

" Of course not. When was I here last ? "

" In May, sir."

" Ah ! "

He looked at the pretty figure, demure beneath his gaze, the grey eyes meeting his frankly, the head well upraised beneath its disorderly fair hair.

" Why don't you wear a cap in the mornings ? " he asked abruptly.

" Oh, sir, 'tis so dowdy, and old-maidish ! "

" Nonsense ! It's homely, and becomes your years."

" I don't believe you know how old I am," she retorted. " You clean forgot my last birthday."

" Say ' quite ' not ' clean.' How old are you ? "

" What do you say to four-and-twenty ? " she asked, her eyes on her shoes.

" Will you never learn to speak correctly ? " cried her father. " ' What do you say to——! ' Where do you pick up such vile expressions ? "

" 'Tis what old Joe Vickers says to Jan Bollam when he asks him what he'll have to drink," explained the maiden.

" You annoy me, Josian. You annoy me very much. You might be a coal-heaver's daughter from the style of your conversation. It is time there was a change."

Josian's bright eyes grew brighter, her red lips fell apart. Then she bit the lower one to keep in another profane remark. She was thinking, " Oh, gemini, that's the way the wind sits, is it ? "

Her father regarded her again. His thoughts were gloomy, and turned upon six feet of freshly dug earth down at Bindon Abbey. Three weeks ! Surely the ground had settled down upon its grim secret by now !

" Since you are four-and-twenty," began Trehane, dragging his thoughts from the midnight horror to the girl before him.

" But, indeed, I'm not, sir ! " she interrupted with a laugh that struck painfully across his aching nerves.

" You told me so a moment ago ! " he reminded her harshly.

" No. I only said——"

" No matter, no matter ! Don't trifle with me ! I'll not stand it."

" Well, then, sir, I'm twenty-two years, three months and—five days."

" Very well. At least, I suppose, you're old enough to take care of yourself."

The neglected girl might have replied with truth that she had been more or less left to do so since her mother's death nineteen years before. But curiosity stirred languidly within her, therefore she held her peace.

The Home Secretary rose and stood looking down upon her frowning awhile. He broke into the purpose of his visit awkwardly.

" Your mother's brother," he began, " has made a certain request of me."

" Indeed, sir ? Am I to hear it ? "

" Certainly. Since it concerns yourself."

Josian's large eyes expressed considerable amazement. No intercourse had passed, to her knowledge, between the two sides of the family for years. She had not even been certain whether her uncle was dead or alive.

" Concerns me ? " she cried. " How so, pray ? "

" Intimately. You have heard, perhaps, that your relative is a sculptor—of some ability, I am given to understand."

" Oh, is he ? I didn't know. I only saw him once. I can just remember him—an old man in a red cloak of some sort, with a lot of grey hair. Why, he must be as old as Methuselum by now ! "

" Say ' Methuselah,' " gravely corrected the father. " Yes, your relative is getting on in years, but he is active and cunning still. A man who may live to be a hundred."

" How interesting ! But what has such a very venerable old boy—I mean, old gentleman, to do with me ? "

" He has asked my permission for you to sit to him."

Josian very nearly said, " The devil he has ! " but changed it in time to :

" Oh ! And what about mine ? "

" The matter rested, of course, in my hands."

"Of course," murmured the girl. "And what did you say?"

"I refused, very naturally refused."

"Does sitting hurt?"

Trehane frowned. This child of his was an enigma. But then, he had never taken the trouble to attempt a solution.

"It is not that."

"Perhaps 'tis unladylike."

"In this case it might have been done without loss of dignity. To sit to a relative conveys no slur to one's self-respect."

"I wonder why he wanted me," said the girl.

"He wished to use your head for a model of Flora."

"The goddess of flowers—how delightful! What made him think of me?"

"It seems that he saw you down at Weymouth last year."

"And thought me like Flora! What a dear old man! I believe I could kiss him."

Trehane's frown withered her gaiety.

"Why mustn't I be modelled as Flora, sir?" she asked demurely.

"Your mother's brother and I have never been on friendly terms," her father answered her with a slight change of manner.

He sat down again, and became a little more ponderous in his speech. Josian, for her part, was glowing with interest.

"When I married your mother," Trehane continued, "her brother Robert, who was many years older than she, grossly insulted me. He said things which no man could be expected to forget. Since then he has been a constant worry and vexation to me. There was a matter of a legacy left to your mother by a distant relation. The loss of it to Robert Crumpler augmented his ill-feeling. If he could now do me an irreparable wrong, he would. He is a man of narrow ideas, in spite of his artistic parts, and extremely tenacious of his opinions. He conceives some fancied grudge—such as I have alluded to—and moves heaven and earth to satisfy his spite. He is a man from whom no one in his power could expect mercy."

"I see," mused Josian. "So that's why you won't let me sit to him."

The Home Secretary reddened beneath his customary pallor. Conscious of the girl's coolly critical eyes, he moved his seat farther out of the light.

"I did refuse," he stated a little didactically. "It seemed

good to me at first to do so. But your relative is persistent . . . and . . . I have since seen fit to change my mind."

" Oh, lor'," said Josian, " why on earth didn't you say so at once? Then I am to go and play Flora to my dear uncle's—what's the name of the ancient heathen who fell in love with his statue and made her come to life? I'll ask my uncle, I vow, if any of his subjects ever come to life."

" I should be much obliged, Josian," said her father, " if you would treat the matter as soberly as it deserves."

" I beg your pardon, sir," murmured a subdued damsel.

" Now attend. I say that I have changed my mind. It is now my wish that you should go down to Bindon, where Mr. Crumpler lives, as soon as possible. In fact, I may say—I ought, perhaps, to tell you that the matter is imperative."

" Yes, sir? " Josian was looking at him with some reflex of his own gravity.

" Yes. So much so that I feel obliged to a certain extent to take you into my confidence."

After that, he made so long a pause that the girl grew restless, uneasy, doubtful, throwing bright glances into his face darkened with what would have been a fluttering sympathy had his attitude towards her ever encouraged such a temper of mind. At length he moved to the window, and stood there, gazing out at the busy traffic of the street as he spoke to her.

" Some weeks ago," he said, " Mr. Crumpler came to my office in London, and demanded to see me. Such a proceeding was highly irregular, and I resented it accordingly. Finding that he paid no heed to my orders conveyed through the proper channel, and being loth to risk anything in the nature of a disturbance, I finally sent my secretary to attend to the business. I ought to tell you, however, that this young man is Mr. Crumpler's stepson, to whom he appears to be in some way attached. As the young man did not return within a reasonable time, I became both angry and impatient, and committed the fatal imprudence of going to seek him in person instead of summoning an attendant."

Josian left off swaying her foot, and threw in an interruption.

" Fatal, sir? " she queried. " Why fatal? "

The matter was growing in interest every moment.

" Allow me to proceed. I found young Drenchard lounging in one of the lobbies——"

" My cousin, sir? "

" Be quiet, girl ! The fellow is no kin of yours. I found him, I say, idling in the lobby with another official. When I inquired what he was doing there and if he had obeyed my order, it appeared that he had not even seen his stepfather. I marched him to the door of the room where Mr. Crumpler, as I supposed, was waiting, and leaving him to carry out my directions, I returned to my private room. When I reached it, I was excessively annoyed to see the old man himself coming out of it. However, having no reason to suspect anything wrong, I merely took him to task for the unwarrantable intrusion, refused to listen to his repeated request for you to sit to him, and saw him escorted off the premises as soon as possible."

" And where did the harm come in ? " Josian asked, as her father made a long pause.

Trehane studied the various phases of life in Poole High Street with introspective eyes. The hay waggons, the mackerel jowters, the amphibious creatures of the quay, here and there a foreign sailorman from Brittany or Scandinavia, the fishwives, the sober townsfolk—all passed beneath his gaze unheeded. As far as his gloomy visionings went, these humans might have all borne the same face—one writhed with agony, pallid with pain, frozen into an immutable expression of death.

" The harm," he said at length, wringing his secret unwillingly from his own lips, and only so betraying himself because he saw no prospect of help save by taking this inconsequent girl into his full confidence, " lies in the fact that during the few minutes he was alone in my room he abstracted from my table—a most important document."

" Oh ! " This with a little thrill of excitement. Josian looked at her father with bright eyes.

" Important," he continued, checking her with a glance, " for several reasons. To begin with, it was Crown property. It bore the Royal Signature. Again, its mere loss while in my charge would involve me in ruin and disgrace, were once the fact discovered. And, also, the non-delivery of that paper in the proper quarter, at the proper time—has cost a man his life."

" Heavens above us ! " cried the girl with a shudder. " What was the paper, then ? "

" The paper was—is—a reprieve."

" Oh ! . . . And you mean that—that—good Lord, it's horrible ! "

She sat looking at her father, silent, overcome, gazing for the

first time at one of the grim facts of life, and finding it unspeakably grotesque and ugly.

"Did he—the old man—know this when he stole it?" she asked at length in quiet tones.

"He declares that he did not. Probably he speaks the truth there. However, the fact remains that he came to my residence and deliberately took the document from my table, intending by this theft to injure me."

"And the other man is dead?" asked Josian, still shaken out of her girlish indifference, and with a note of pity in her tones.

"Yes—dead."

Josian let her eyes, filled with the strange new perplexity, move to the window, across which passed and repassed the medley procession of Life, while to her had come on a sudden the awful meaning of Death. For such, to the young and thoughtless, it must ever appear.

"What had he done?" she asked beneath her breath.

Her father frowned.

"That," he said, "is a point which need not trouble you. So far, the harm done in this matter is irretrievable. But God grant another aspect of the evil may still be averted. Are you attending, miss?"

"Yes, father."

"I have told you that Mr. Crumpler's design is to ruin me. He has openly threatened it. As long as that paper remains in his possession, I can never know a moment's peace or security."

"Why, what more harm can he do?"

"More? As yet he has not—— Well, he may produce that paper at any time. Remember that his stepson holds a responsible place at my table——"

"Can't you send him packing?"

"If I dismissed him, Mr. Crumpler would strike immediately. To produce that paper now or at any time would mean my ruin. Cannot you understand that whoever else may have tampered with such a document, I, and I alone, am responsible to the Crown for its safety so long as it was in my possession?"

"Yes. I see that," the girl said gravely. She had never touched her father so nearly in point of sympathy before, but she could not get the dead man out of her mind, nevertheless. "But isn't it bound to be discovered sooner or later? Doesn't anyone in the office know?"

Trehane winced. She had touched with her youthful feminine

finger the two obvious weak spots in the whole position. Yet her acuteness pleased him, after the soreness had passed off.

" To answer your last question first," he said, " I was fortunate enough to discover the loss myself. But, owing to my mind being unsettled through my annoyance with Crumpler, I did not do so at once. It was only when I received the receipts for twelve reprieves from the Clerk of the Crown that I remembered there should have been thirteen. The only one likely to have made a similar discovery is young Drenchard. If he did so, he is then in collusion with his stepfather, for he has failed to report the matter to me."

" And other people, sir ? "

" The reprieves passed through no hands but mine and Drenchard's. The Royal Signature was affixed to them, but in an irregular manner. They were sent for in a hurry, and there was no time to prepare them properly——"

" Does the Prince usually sign important documents in a hurry ? " asked the innocent girl.

" I have said," returned her father with a touch of reserve, " that the affair was irregular. His Royal Highness was anxious to set out on a journey, and was only restrained with the greatest difficulty from departing without signing at all. It is, in the circumstances, extremely improbable that he has the slightest recollection of the subject matter of what he signed. Nor is the fact of this particular exe—accident likely to come to his knowledge in the ordinary way, although he passed through the town in question almost at the identical moment. But, were the document produced now or at any future time, an inquiry would immediately result, and then, I tell you, my ruin would be certain. Unhappily, the Regent's greatest friend is my bitterest political enemy."

" It looks stormy," murmured Josian thoughtfully. " Squally, to say the least of it. Have you thought of any plan, sir ? "

" Yes."

" Am I to hear that also ? "

Her father bowed, and bringing forward a chair, sat down by her side.

" I wish you to help me," he said.

Josian jumped in her seat.

" Lord love us, sir, how ? "

" Keep silent, and attend. I have told you of Mr. Crumpler's

request concerning yourself. I am going to accede to it. I am going to send you down to Bindon."

After making this statement, the Home Secretary looked at his daughter so closely and with so much meaning in his expression, that his intention came home at once to a mind all unused to innuendoes and intrigue. But Josian Trehane, beneath her gaiety and insouciance, was no fool.

"Ah!" she said, biting her scarlet lip. "You want me to get that paper for you."

"Hush! . . . Yes."

Josian sat silent and thoughtful awhile.

"How is it to be done?" she queried at length. And again, more doubtfully, "Can it be done?"

"With care and ingenuity, I think so. Yes."

There was another pause.

Outside the window the medley procession of workers and idlers in the great web of Life still continued on its way. Inside the room, Josian Trehane hesitated. Away down in the heart of Dorset, the one whose future hung fatefully upon the issue awaited her decision, unknown to her, unknown to himself.

Yet it was of him that she was thinking at the back of her mind when at length she said:

"I'd do anything to outwit that horrid old man, of course. If you really do think, sir——"

"I do," Trehane replied with alacrity. "But you will have to be careful; meet wile with wile. Above all, you must not allow any sentiment of distaste for Mr. Crumpler to appear. He is very shrewd, very suspicious. If you once cause him to distrust your presence, you will do more harm than good, and earn for yourself some unpleasant moments. Do you understand?"

Josian laughed.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of uncle, I assure you," she declared. "Nor need you be afraid for me. I can take care of myself at a pinch, be very certain. But the thing won't be easy—no, not at all."

"It will not," agreed her father. "But if you can contrive to win the old man's confidence and favour, your wits should do the rest. I can give you no special directions, and once you are at the Tower there must be no correspondence between us on the matter. Understand that, for it is very important. Write me word of your arrival, and after that nothing more until you

are at home again. Remember, there is an enemy in my camp as well."

Josian readily promised, her girlish vanity pleased that so much was to be left to her own discretion.

" I think that is all," said her father after a moment's thought, during which the last shreds of his reluctance at sending the girl at all were finally struggled with and crushed. " I will write and advise Mr. Crumpler of your coming. By the way, take a capable woman with you, for there are no servants at the Tower of the Winds. Mr. Crumpler lives alone."

" I'll make my arrangements very discreetly," Josian assured him.

" If he should offer you the paper of his own accord, you will take it without surprise or comment. It is the ostensible understanding between us. But I place no great faith in his promise, so do not wait for a fulfilment that is unlikely to occur. Do nothing to arouse either his anger or his suspicion. I cannot advise you further than that."

" I'll be very careful, I promise you."

" Can you start at once ? "

" This very day, sir."

" That is well," Trehane said, and with a little condescending bend of the head he gravely kissed her.

VII

THE QUESTION

THE world into which Demetrius Jordan came was one of high golden lights and vivid greens. A world of summer sunshine and cool verdant shade, of lush grasses, running water, majestic boles of chestnut, elm and beech ; of murmurous winds, and frantic choruses of birds ; of rejuvenated nature and the decay of ancient things.

As far as outward appearances went, no fitter world could have been planned to receive one in his peculiar circumstances. It seemed to claim no contiguity to any spot under heaven. In essence, it was still as isolated, self-communing, and self-contained as in the days of old time, when a long procession of monks and abbots in turn made this spot their home.

Gone was now the noble pile of buildings which once had constituted this foundation of Bindon Abbey. Of its former grandeur there remained nothing but the storied gateway with the porter's chambers attached, some crumbling walls of masonry never rising to more than the height of a man, a few detached stones, and one or two stone sarcophagi, holding the dusty remains of the ancient fathers of the place. Where once a stately church had stood there was nothing left but a barely traceable line of foundations, so that, in truth, conies and wild birds found shelter among the ruins of high altar and saintly shrine. Cloisters were memorable only by reason of the quadrangle of sward which still bore the name of the Monks' Garth, and preserved its level pitch amid the broken ground on either side. Refectory, kitchen, buttery—these were as extinct as the services and ritual and all the busy ordering of a long past day.

Yet, as the ground even now bore testimony to its previous possessors—so that one could not prod into a clump of ivy or bramble without coming upon the solid masonry which it concealed—so something of its former traditions still clung about

the place. One essential attribute of its spiritual avocations adhered in spite of long disuse ; its peace remained.

Peace, yellow sunshine, green shade, running water, following no devious course of its own channeling, but flowing between regular banks with the forced exactitude of a canal. Into this world stepped the young Demetrius on a certain morning, and looked about him with the wondering rapture natural to a full-grown intelligence that finds itself in a fair world, placed between two voids—that of the past and that of the future.

Before him lay the sunny glades and deep avenues of the Abbey grounds. Behind him, the habitation where he had been nursed back to life. To this he gave no heed for the moment, but plunged forward with his weak footsteps until he stood beneath the heavily foliaged trees at the water's edge.

By then, his feeble strength was exhausted, and dropping down upon the rotting trunk of a fallen beech he turned his eyes the way he had come. It was now that he saw the exterior of Robert Crumpler's house for the first time.

It stood in a corner of the grounds to the left of the gateway, and was a sufficiently remarkable erection even for the eccentric personality who inhabited it. In appearance it resembled the nave of a small church, devoid of transepts and chancel, its ecclesiastical character being further emphasized by the addition of a square battlemented tower at the farther end. From the centre of this tower, which itself was a considerable height above the pitch of the main building, there arose a circular turret, topping the tower by some twenty feet and open to the skies. For which reason the owner had given it the name of the Sky Parlour. The whole building was of rough-hewn stone of local quarrying, and though its decades might be easily numbered upon the fingers of one hand, so closely had it been placed to the densest mass of trees and undergrowth that already its stones were stained and its roof chequered with the yellows and greens of moss and lichen. Around and about it the winds crossed and recrossed each other in an ever varying but never ceasing thenody.

Such a place, known by hearsay only, might have been supposed to harmonize with its surroundings, or, at least, to offer no violent violation to their traditions. Yet a certain cold austerity, severity of outline, and lack of the genial grace of flowers and creepers, made the house more or less of an anachronism. It appeared even a little sinister and foreboding.

Demetrius Jordan's mind, empty of all former impressions, was exceedingly receptive of a new one, and the cold grey look of the house, lifeless and lonely in the brilliant summer sunshine, set him shuddering inwardly. He turned his eyes away. Leaning back against a tree-trunk, he began, for the first time in his life as it seemed to himself, to think.

His mind was well aware of its own deficiency, but had hitherto been perfectly incurious as to that past of which he had no memory—not so much as the knowledge of his own name. Who he was, what he was, why he found himself slowly recovering from sickness in the hands of a strange mannered old man—of all this he was utterly ignorant, and, until this moment, contentedly so. But now, with his first excursion into the open air, a nascent self-interest stirred within him, and its earliest expression was the somewhat childish yet perfectly natural desire to find out what manner of man he was who now sat under a beech tree in the midst of so much sylvan loveliness.

He looked down at his clothes, carelessly donned with the old man's help and not heeded at the time. They were stained and frayed in places, yet once they must have been smart enough. The material was good—he knew that instinctively, for his wits and intellect were awake and alive ; his memory only had gone—and though at present they hung loosely upon him that was probably due to the emaciation consequent upon his recent illness. He decided that they were his own clothes, in spite of the sagging folds and slackness at the waist and wrists. And they had pockets in them. He had not thought of that before. Now he plunged his fingers rapidly into one after another, and experienced a sharp sense of disappointment when the first three ventures yielded no result. Then he found a crumpled handkerchief and examining it eagerly saw that it was of a delicate material, and that from its size and general appearance it had no natural connection with the garment in which it had been discovered. Scrutinizing it more closely, in the hope of discerning some mark or other upon it, he was at once aware of a faint musky perfume stirring like one of his lost memories amid the fresher scents of the summer air.

" It's a woman's," he said, and sat thinking and staring at the flimsy thing in his hand.

For the first time the blankness of his mind troubled him. But the vexation was as yet unmixed with pain, being merely the irritation incidental to the sense of a pleasure denied. For

here was evidence of some interesting episode which he was unable to recall. The fact was the first diluted drop of gall in his cup of contentment. As the effort after even so trivial a memory wearied and distressed him, he presently gave up the attempt, and continued his investigations with more interest if with less confidence than before.

His fingers finally closed upon a fragment of paper tucked away inside the torn lining of one of the breeches pockets. He extricated it carefully, and found it to be a narrow slip folded in two. On the inner side was a line of writing—three words faintly pencilled in a feminine hand.

" God bless you."

And again, as he read, there was exhaled around him the delicate scent of musk.

Demetrius sat wondering. Memory refused to stir, and imagination was thrust into the breach. This then, as far as he knew, was all that he had to help him to a clear understanding of his own position before—before—*what?* Well, since the effort in that direction was painful and only ended in clouding his brain, let that pass. What had he got here? A woman's handkerchief and a fragment of paper with a few words, a conventional blessing, inscribed in a woman's hand. " God bless you." Why? Was the woman who had written that the same as she to whom the handkerchief belonged? And, if so, what connection existed between himself and her? Or had, in truth, his presupposition been wrong, and were the clothes not his own property after all?

He thought until his temples throbbed, for the matter teased him with a persistency that threatened ill for his future contentment. But already that contentment had been assailed, and his empty mind was fast filling with doubts and problems in default of memories.

" I will ask the old man," he said to himself a dozen of times. But the decision inevitably implied a dependence upon another's veracity and knowledge. He wanted, all the more because the thing seemed impossible, to set his own seal of assurance upon the facts. Herein—although, his inquisition not having yet passed into the introspective stage, he was not yet aware of the fact—lay evidence of an independent character and of a mind accustomed to judge for itself.

To follow the obvious course of seeking the old man within the house and plying him with questions was not only unsatisfying,

but it involved a physical labour to which, in his present condition, Demetrius felt unequal. Leaving the perplexing matter for the time being, he presently continued his investigations as he had at first conceived them. From his clothes he passed to his person. He examined his hands, found them well-formed and of a pleasant smoothness, ran the approved fingers up and down his features, decided that this was an unsatisfactory medium, and, while rising to estimate his height, strolled towards the river that he might use it as a natural looking-glass.

Finding a patch where the water ran dark beneath the heavy foliage above, he dropped to his hands and knees and peered in. A face looked up at him out of the crinkling water. The face of a young man, almost morbidly intent upon the examination, with widespread eyes that held a hint of fear, and delicate features slightly pinched and wan. Above, a good expanse of forehead and a mass of uncurled hair.

Demetrius smiled and nodded at the reflection.

" You're a better looking fellow than I expected to find, my unknown friend," he said. " I hope you behave well. Hulloa, what's this ? "

A turn of the head had revealed a white patch of the span of a man's hand spread upon the hair a little above the left ear. Instinctively Demetrius raised his hand, smoothed the patch and examined his palm.

" It's not powder or paint," he said, and sat back on the bank, wondering anew.

" Nonsense ! " he argued a moment later. " It can't be natural ; that's absurd. I have it ! The old gentleman's been spilling some of his messy whitewash stuff over me while I was asleep. A dousing will soon remedy that ; and you may as well be clean, my friend, you know."

He leant down the steep bank and reached out a hand, ducking his head for the ablution. Then he paused, and flung the water away.

" No need to spoil your pretty things, my lad," he murmured, and therewith pulled off the strip of cambric that formed Crumpler's notion of a fashionable cravat.

Overhead the boughs parted in the light breeze, then drew together again. Demetrius, craning forward, grew suddenly stiff with attention. So he remained for half a minute, staring perplexedly at the reflection of his stretched-out throat, across

the whiteness of which there was discernible a narrow discoloured mark.

"Ah!" he commented, as he soused his head in the water. "An accident. I've had an accident—looks like the scar of a burn. That accounts for the illness, I suppose."

But the next moment he was frowning again, and he sat back on his heels, the water running from head and hands, and the white patch fixed upon his hair as immovably as before.

"Nonsense! 'Tis ridiculous!" he muttered, and got to his feet a trifle heavily.

He walked about in the sunshine for a time, while the moisture dissipated from him in the warm air. And as he walked he no longer paid heed to the beauties of the morning or the peacefulness of his surroundings. Already the doubt and the question had entered into his Eden, vexing his newly awakened mind with the problematic "Who?"

He had found his way across the intersecting river into the farther confines of the grounds, and was listlessly regarding a curious conical mound of solid earth surmounted by a few broken stones, when a hand fell on his shoulder. He started violently, and, turning, found the old sculptor at his side.

For a moment or so the man who had sheltered him remained looking at him in silence, a soundless chuckle on his lips, his grey hair floating in the breeze, his scarlet toga falling loosely about his spare frame. And Demetrius, for all his intended questioning, was held quiet and motionless by a sudden shrinking reluctance to speak. For the face so near to his was full of knowledge that mocked while it withheld.

At length the old man spoke:

"Well, and how do you find yourself?"

Demetrius drew a long breath and recovered his former temper.

"I find myself very well, thanks to you," he answered. "But there are one or two things that are troubling me."

"Ha!" Crumpler said, letting the suspended chuckle out at last. He raised a twisted stick which he invariably carried when out of doors, and tapped the young man's shoulder. "I knew how 'twould be, burn me if I didn't! You've been looking at yourself, eh?"

"Yes," said Demetrius. For some reason that scarcely deserved the name, so involuntary was the action, he began to cover

up his throat. " Can you tell me "—he hesitated over the words —" anything about myself ? "

" Han't you remembered aught yet ? "

Demetrius shook his head dejectedly.

" No. Nothing. Nothing of that sort. I suppose I do remember certain things, for I seem to know them instinctively. But of what I want to know—nothing."

" Well ? What in particular do you want to know ? I can't tell you everything, mind."

Again the question trembling on Demetrius's tongue hung there, hesitating. He put a lesser one before it :

" These clothes, are they my own ? "

" So far as I know. They're what you came here in. Stay, though ! You weren't wearing 'em all. Only the shirt and breeches."

" Isn't the coat mine, then ? " Demetrius was thinking of the handkerchief.

" I suppose so. It came along with you, anyway."

" But——"

" Hold now ! I'm wrong, after all. Devil take it if my mem'ry isn't getting so bad as your own, he he ! The clothes aren't yours. I forgot that."

" Not mine ? Then——"

" Hold your tongue ! " snapped the old man. " They're not yours ; they're mine."

" Oh ! "

" 'Cause I bought 'em along with you. But you can keep 'em, since you've no others. You must take care of 'em, mind. For you'll get no more until you've earned them."

" I'm tired," said Demetrius, looking white and worn. " I think I'll go indoors. I don't understand. Perhaps if I rest awhile——"

" Ay, ay," returned the other, nodding, bright-eyed and wry lipped, at him, " rest while ye may. Rest, and get strong, for you'll have to start work soon."

" Work," repeated the young man, the curious furtive look deepening in his eyes.

" Ay, work. Han't you ever worked before ? "

Demetrius made no reply to that. The intentness of his look was almost painful. He put out a shaking hand.

" For God's sake," he cried, " tell me who I am ! "

Robert Crumpler's eyes twinkled malignantly.

" No, my lad," he said, " I can't do that, for I don't know precisely. But, if you like, I'll tell you what you are."

" If you will be so good," murmured the young fellow faintly.

Crumpler pointed to the grass.

" Sit there," he said. " I don't want you turning sick all on a sudden and falling down. . . . Are you ready ? "

He stooped over the reclining Demetrius and spoke in his ear.

VIII

THE ANSWER

"YOU'M a murderer!"

Then he stood up, chuckling impishly.

For a long moment Demetrius looked at him in silence. His face, pale before from illness, had now gone grey from excess of emotion. His eyes appeared to have sunk into his head, so deep and intent, so much more intense had become that expression of furtive horror. His very limbs grew flaccid and nerveless; his mouth hung open; his features twitched. The old sculptor danced with delight.

"Ha ha!" he cried. "Splendid, splendid! Judas after the Betrayal. Keep so, keep so. 'Tis fine indeed!"

Gradually the horror-stricken, incredulous face drooped and changed. Thought itself might have been traced like a concrete substance upon that ashy countenance, so expressive was it of doubt and fear. And behind was the shadow of a great agony—the wish to remember, the inability to recollect.

And still, face to face with so much human anguish, Crumpler continued to gibe and gesticulate, and to applaud like a man at a play.

"Keep it up, keep it up," he cried. "Gad, 'tis rare to watch 'ee! 'Tis so fine—almost—as the look you bore when I first saw you!"

Demetrius sprang up. Once again his expression had changed. Now his eyes were bright with denial. His stammering tongue had found its use. His whole body was tense and firm. He flung his hands on to the old man's shoulders.

"It's not true! It's not true!" he cried. "You're jesting with me! You're taking advantage of my not being able to remember anything. Oh, it isn't true! For God's sake, tell me it isn't true!"

Beneath his touch, the sculptor was sobered a little. He threw off the grip of the clinging hands, and abruptly motioned

Demetrius back to the block of stone from which he had arisen. "Don't lose your head, young man," he said. "I can't alter facts, can I? And, after all, you've a deal to be thankful for. You ought to be lying snug underground, and you're not. You ought to be so dead as mutton, and here you are, so sturdy a young cockerel as ever flapped wings. You ought——"

"Stop! For pity's sake, stop!" cried the distressed Demetrius. "One moment! Good God, it's horrible! I can't believe it—I won't. I—I—will remember! Let me think. In mercy, sir, one minute of peace—to think—to remember—ah!"

He started up, wild-eyed and flushing. Crumpler, deliberately, but not ungently, had laid hold upon the wisp of cambric which swathed the other's throat. Baring it, he fixed his glittering eyes on those tormented ones opposite, and said:

"You've seen that, I take it. Did it teach you naught?"

Demetrius covered his throat with stiff fingers, stepping back a pace.

"It was a sight redder and plainer when you came here," Crumpler went on. "But there's enough left to prove that I'm not jesting, young feller, I'd ha' thought."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"You saw the mark, didn't you?"

Demetrius nodded.

"Well, then, what did you take it for?"

"I thought—an accident."

"Ay, an accident. You'm right, my lad."

"A burn, I thought."

"Well, maybe it burnt you; maybe it did. Scorched the skin off ye—a pity, too, for your skin's so fair as a maid's. But you'll be whole in a month or so, and no harm done."

Demetrius had got back the scarf and was twisting it round his disfigured throat with passionately eager fingers. He controlled his lips to speak, but did not look at his companion while he put the question.

"What was it?" he asked humbly, abjectly enough.

The grim humour of the moment appealed to the sculptor. He struck his hands together.

"The rope, my lad; Jack Ketch's rope. What else could it be? Such a mark as that!"

Demetrius covered his face and groaned aloud. But presently his bruised and defaced manhood struck out passionately for its existence. He looked at his companion fairly, eye to eye.

" It's all lies that you have been telling me," he asserted boldly. " I don't believe a word of it. It's an ugly cruel jest, unworthy of your kindness, sir. Let us go back to the beginning, please. Once more I ask you, who am I ? "

" Young man, I've no answer different from what I gave ye just now. Or, if I have, 'tisn't one as you'll be better pleased to hear."

" Let me judge of that, sir. Again, who am I ? "

" You'm my property ; my goods and chattels ; my serving-man, to fetch and carry, to obey and answer civil—and to bear stripes if you don't ! You'm to lend me your head and your hands and all your limbs when I need 'em for the modelling, for I bought 'em—gadso, I bought 'em for five guineas. That's what you are, my lad, and don't let your memory play you any tricks there, or you'll dearly repent it ! "

" You mean that you bought—me ? " cried Demetrius, his mind fixing at once upon the salient point in the centre of much that troubled him. " Bought me ? Here—in these days—here, in England ? Oh, but that's nonsense, sir."

Crumpler thrust out his lip at him. His only sentiment towards the life which he had restored was an economic one.

" That's impudence," he declared. " I'll not have a man of mine talking so. Sooner you learn your place the better for your skin—understand that ! What d'ye say ? I couldn't have bought you ? Why, you fool, d'ye suppose that every criminal that swings is put to bed decently in a prison yard ? And if the surgeons have the pick of the likeliest, why not the finest sculptor in the land, eh ? Lord, but you're beautiful, lad—beautiful. Lift your arm—so ! See how firm and fine the line is from armpit to ankle ! I don't know but what I'd sooner have you alive than dead, after all."

Demetrius turned away impatiently. As yet, his mind was in a state of bewilderment, and he had learned very little that he wanted to know.

" You have not told me enough," he said after a moment's painful thought. " I must know more."

" What ? "

" All that you can tell me ! You say you bought me—you don't say of whom. You call me—a murderer. You must tell me more than that. You imply that the hangman has laid violent hands upon me—please explain how it comes about that I am still alive ! Don't you see, sir, that in my unhappy condi-

tion I cannot be satisfied with these meagre scraps of information, which torment me and yet tell me nothing? You haven't even told me my name."

"Well, I'll indulge you in that," replied Crumpler, still with a touch of malicious enjoyment in his manner. "Or you'll have a rare excuse for not coming when I call. Your name's Demetrius. A bit high-flown for a servant, but it will do."

"Demetrius—what else?"

"Naught else, so far as I'm concerned, and what's good enough for your master ought to be good enough for you."

"You are not my master yet. There must be a surname. I insist on knowing it."

"Oho! You insist, do you? Pretty talking! Servants don't need surnames. Or if your gentility's so cursed particular go and ask them at Dorchester Gaol. I dare say they'll remember you, he he!"

The young man winced, and did not pursue that point any farther. His spurt of temper had passed, but the look of pain was deepening on his face.

"At least," he said more humbly, "tell me the details of your transaction, sir."

"Details? Not many o' them. I've been looking for a face like yours for years. So when you were booked for Master Hangman, I struck a bargain with the Governor to have you so soon as you were cut down. Owing to Royalty being about, it seems you were taken off the gallus sooner than you ought to have been. Anyhow, you hadn't been in my lawful possession—lawful possession it was, for Barjona paid the money and got a receipt when they handed you over——"

"Who's Barjona?" demanded Demetrius, who had been listening with painful intentness.

"Chap that brought you here. Tranter over to Wool. You'd best go and ask him if I be lying. He knows all about ye."

"Yes, I will. Go on."

"You hadn't been, as I say, more 'an a couple of hours in my lawful possession when you came to, most unexpected like, and spoilt all my plans for using ye for a St. Stephen by turning into a sick Adonis before my eyes. Not but what you may thank me that you weren't dead meat long ago, for all the little gratitude there is in your shapely carcass, boy."

Demetrius lowered his gaze, remaining silent awhile. Then he looked up with a kind of shamed eagerness.

"I wish I could feel more grateful," he said. "I do thank you. But—perhaps it might have been kinder to let me die."

"Well," said Crumpler magnanimously, "I don't grudge you your life, or the bit o' trouble I've been put to over you, so long as you make yourself useful. I'm getting an old man now, and, if I'm to make my name known as it ought to be, there's not too much time to spare. Can ye cook?"

"I don't know. How can I say? I know nothing about myself—nothing. I have it all to find out—all! Oh, was there ever such a hopeless position before?"

"Well, then——"

Demetrius faced round with sudden passion, his features delicately flushed, his eyes bright with pain.

"Tell me this," he demanded. "If I am what you say, how is it that you don't shrink from me, scorn me, loathe me for an evil thing? If I am indeed what you call me, God knows I shrink from myself!"

Crumpler smiled tolerantly, and, reaching out lean hands, patted the drooping shoulders.

"Don't ye worry about that, my lad," he said. "With your past sins I've naught to do. 'Tis neither here nor there, so far as I'm concerned. All you've got to remember is this: don't go trying any little games with me, for, if you're caught red-handed again, you may wager the guilty soul of ye they'll take good care to strangle you tight enough the second time. As for the rest, it suits me very well to have such as you for my servant. There's too much advantage in your situation for me to wish to change. I shan't be afraid of your running away, 'cos you know so well as I do that nobody else would hire you. And you can't go home for two reasons; you don't know where your home is, and your folk wouldn't be best pleased to welcome ye, I take it, if you did. And I'm not sure that the law couldn't hang you over again, if they caught you at large. So you'd best lie low for the present, and——"

The unhappy Demetrius flung his hands to his head. The burden of the prospect that was closing in upon him crushed heart and brain alike. The old cry of Cain rose to his lips.

"Don't!" he implored passionately. "For God's sake, stop! I can't bear it! I can't bear any more now!"

He dropped to his knees, and fell at full length upon the ground, hiding his agony from the brightness of the day. Dry

sobs shook his body as with strong convulsions, and the white patch of hair shone with silvery lustre in the sunlight.

Out of the depths his soul cried passionately for a revelation which did not come.

His mind remained as blank and empty as before.

IX

RE-ENTRANCE

THE village of Wool might have been best described as a place of many waters.

Wherever the eye turned, it fell upon brooks, streams and rivulets. Nor was the all-prevailing element constrained to the boundaries of meadow and field. It meandered down the main street in the form of runlets that separated the footpath from the road, and were broad enough to need bridging over by large flat slabs of stone. Here and there pumps had been erected in addition to the wells with which the place was studded. These supplied the adult population with various local centres of gossip as deeply appreciated as were the miniature bridges of stone beneath which the urchins floated scraps of wood and fragments of paper.

Outside the confines of the village proper, the river ran in broad curves beneath a noble bridge of great antiquity, and watered many acres of fair pasture land, before sweeping down to turn the ancient mill at Bindon. Thence it flowed into the canal-like channels in which it forced its way through the neighbouring Abbey grounds.

Tributaries were thrown off nearer the village, and wandered, in a haphazard, intrusive style, through gardens and by the outer side of the hedges, so that, here again, the inhabitants must needs enter their domains by means of a diminutive and stationary drawbridge. In loops and knots the errant streamlets took their way through the hamlet, and having followed their erratic courses wandered out again as purposelessly as they had entered it. No one thought of attempting to divert any one stream. Should a man, desiring to build a cottage or barn, find his site already occupied by a trickle of water, he promptly set up his building with as little disaffection to the brook as could be, and praised God for having a stream of running water, into which he might dip his bucket at will, flowing past his door.

An inn dedicated to the Black Bear, a row of cottages, a tiny shop, an ancient church set amid an overgrown yard—these, with a by-lane or two, made up the village of Wool in the days when Barjona Furmedge tranted between it and Dorchester.

Three days did he devote to this his ostensible trade. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, fair or foul, his clumsy cart, with the dingy green awning lettered " B. Furmedge, Tranter," was to be seen leaving the village at sunrise, and returning in the dusk. To these isolated dwellers the man represented the connecting-link between themselves and their neighbours. Many had fallen into the habit of setting their ancient " gran'fers " by his passing. In all places he was regarded as the public vehicle for news and gossip, his word being taken as gospel when the printed page was disbelieved. Parsons and squires did not disdain to rein up when they met him on the road. While to one class of professional men at least he was invaluable. As thus : Barjona in his day's excursion would chance to fall in with a doctor or apothecary. Whereupon the following colloquy would ensue :

" Hi, Furmedge, that you, eh ? " with a salute of the whip in mid-air.

" Ay, sir, 'tes me right enough ! " with a knock of the knuckle on the forehead.

" Come through Wareham ? "

" Straight away, sir."

" Heard anything of old Job Parsons ? "

" Seen his gran'darter, sir."

" How's he getting on ? "

" Doen better to week, they do say."

" Then just drop in at his cottage as you go home, and give him this bottle of physic, will you, Furmedge ? And say that I'll look in next time I'm round that way. And here's a trifle to drink my health in, 'Jona."

And the physic and a sixpence would slide from one palm to the other, and the man of medicine would put his nag into motion in the opposite direction.

To Barjona's credit the physic found its way to its proper destination as surely as did the sixpence to the old stocking beneath his bed.

When he was not on the road the tranter became sunk, or more properly speaking, disintegrated into half a dozen personalities, each having his several avocations. By turns he acted as

gardener, dairyman, ciderman, hedger, sexton to the church, and man-of-all-work to the little Wesleyan meeting-house. For Barjona was, as he described it, "Established by Hereditery and Methodist by Convarsion"; a mode of religious procedure not infrequent in these parts where parsons had been heard to declare that, dang it all, if 'tweren't for the Wesleyans, they would have no congregation at all. So Barjona Furmedge, under the approving eye of either sect, attended church on a Sunday morning as regularly and circumspectly as he marched off to the meeting-house in the afternoon. Occasionally he preached on a week-day evening in the open air. But this seeming disaffection to his Sunday morning principles was counterbalanced by his readiness in the tap of the *Black Bear* to defend the Thirty-Nine Articles against all comers.

He lived alone in a small cottage adjoining the church, for he was locally known as a bachelor-man. In the front of the house, undivided from the public footpath by wall or paling, was a tiny flower garden; in the rear, a small orchard. The wall which separated Furmedge's domain from the churchyard was composed of tombstones, stained and crumbling for the most part, and fallen out of the perpendicular. When one succumbed to the effect of its length of days in its original station, the tranter openly conveyed it to his own garden and made use of it either to strengthen his wall or to mend the pavement of his cider yard.

It might have been conjectured that the presence of so many reminders of the mortality of man would have had a morbid effect upon the lonely dweller. But the cheerful disposition of the tranter, allied to a genuine religious fervour, led him to survey without dismay the various melancholy *hic jacets* and moral adjurations which blinked at him *in parti* from garden and yard.

Furmedge was down among these *memoriæ sacrum* on a Monday morning in July, busy thinning out his cider apples, and humming at his work like a gigantic dumbledore, when happening to glance down from his ladder he espied a figure coming slowly towards him. Craning his head through the interlacing branches, he immediately withdrew it, and descended to the ground, grave of face and less ready of speech than usual. Before him, Demetrius Jordan stood equally tongue-tied and embarrassed. After the first hesitating glance at the man in the tree, his eyes had fallen to the ground—a habit that was daily growing more customary with him.

Barjona broke the silence.

" Day to 'ee, naybore," he said.

" Good day."

" Was you wanten to see me ? "

" Yes."

Demetrius lifted his heavy gaze for a moment, and lowered it again.

" Then do'ee sit down for a bit," the tranter invited, his homely features irradiated by a look of compassion as he let his eyes dwell upon the other's appearance. " You'm looken tar'ble fagged. Art tired ? "

" Yes ; I'm tired."

Barjona led him to a corner of the garden where a number of tombstones lay in process of final dissolution, and sitting down himself made room for the young fellow at his side.

" Thank you."

" None needed. Ye're welcome, I'm sure."

Demetrius turned his eyes, heavy with brooding, dark with that strange furtive horror, full upon his companion.

" You know who I am ? " he asked.

The tranter rubbed his chin, stared up at his apple trees, and down at the testimonitary record of the virtues of one Ehud Widowson, Esq., lying between his feet.

" Well, since you ask me," he said then, " in a way o' spaken, I do."

Demetrius's head went down. There was a pause, during which the tranter studied the virtuous record of Ehud anew :

> Stay, careless reader, shed the pious tear
> Upon the fragrant dust that's buried here.
> A loving Father 'tis, a Husband kind,
> A duteous Son, to neighbours errors blind,
> Tender to friends, to enemys humane,
> His like on Earth no man may see againe.
> But in th' realms of Bliss he now doth quire,
> 'Tis where his saintly sowl did long aspire.

" Where did you see me before ? " Demetrius asked in a low voice.

The tranter brightened visibly.

" Up to Tower," he said.

" And not elsewhere ? "

" Well—not e'zackly."

Another pause.

" Tell me about it," said the young man.

Barjona rubbed his chin again.

" There ben't much to tell," he began. " Meäster Crumpler he called me up to Tower one marnen ; sent woone o' the folk from the mill for I. An' when I got there, he told me as he'd a-got a sick man on his hands. That were you. You was layen in what he do call the Grotter, an' he did need me to help him carry 'ee indoors. . . . In a tar'ble bad taken you was too," added the tranter thoughtfully.

" Were you surprised to see me there ? "

Demetrius did not ask his questions readily. Rather they appeared to be wrung from a troubled soul. At the last one the tranter fell to studying Ehud once more. He was an old friend, one with which he had been familiar in his more orthodox situation ; consequently moss and decay made no difference in his legibility to Barjona Furmedge.

" Mr. Crumpler has told me," Demetrius went on, " that it was you who took me to his house on the previous evening. That I was unconscious, and knew nothing of it."

" Ay. 'Tes so."

" Ah ! . . . it's true, then ? "

" Meanen what, young feller ? "

Demetrius raised his languid hand, and with a sudden passionate gesture tore the carefully twisted scarf from his throat.

" This," he said.

The other's eyes became riveted on the faint line of discoloration that marked the white skin. His own face grew troubled as he looked. Words he had none to utter.

" It is true ! " cried Demetrius violently. " My God, it is true ! "

Then he dropped his shamed head into his hands, and never afterwards did he doubt the truth of the sculptor's tale.

Barjona Furmedge sat looking at him for awhile in silence, experiencing, in his untutored way, the embarrassment which every man feels when one of his own sex breaks down before him. Presently he reached out a hand and laid it without shrinking on the young man's shoulder.

" The Lard ha' marcy 'pon you," he said.

" Mercy ! " repeated Demetrius despairingly, and for an instant showed his face all wet with tears. " He has none ! "

The tranter was genuinely shocked.

"Nay, nay," he expostulated firmly. "'Tesn't so as you should spake. Girt hev been His marcy you'mward. 'Tes a miracle hev happened in theäse latter days, praise to His name!"

Demetrius let his hands fall, and suddenly drew away. With an effort, pitiable because it indicated considerable physical weakness, he pulled himself together.

"You think I'm guilty," he said.

The tranter must have been prepared in some sort for the implication, for he heard it composedly.

"I'm content to leave arl that to the A'mighty," he said. "'Tesn't for I to judge you as is a sinner myself."

"But I tell you I'm not—I'm not—I can't be! O my God, if only I knew!"

A look of keen astonishment brightened Furmedge's somewhat inexpressive features. He turned towards his shrinking companion.

"D'ye mean to say as ye don't know?" he gasped.

Demetrius shook his head.

"I thought you understood," he said more quietly. "My memory is gone. I can remember nothing. I know only that I woke up in Mr. Crumpler's house some time ago. I know only what he has told me."

For some sympathetic reason the quietness of his manner impressed his listener more deeply than his former spurt of vehemence. Again he laid his hand on the drooping shoulder.

"Sit'ee down, my lad," he urged soothingly. "Let's reason together, as the Book says, an' lay it afore the Lard."

Demetrius allowed the speaker to draw him back to his seat, but it was plain that he found no hope of comfort in the words. He dropped his head between his palms and stared down miserably at the broken tombstones.

"An' ye don't call to mind no mwore 'an that?" the tranter prompted gently.

"No."

"An' how much med Meäster Crumpler ha' told ye?"

Demetrius shivered.

"That I was hanged; last month. At Dorchester. For murder."

"Jus' so," said the tranter solemnly. "An' you says as you can't call it to mind. Be your mem'ry quite a-gone?"

Demetrius nodded.

"Ha' ye tried?"

"Have I tried!" repeated his unhappy companion. "At the back of my mind there seems to be something—something"—he opened and shut his hands with a distressful motion—"a great pain, a great dread—no; I can't describe it perfectly, for I hardly know myself what it is. I have tried to grasp it, to drag it to light; to make myself remember. And it's all of no use. There's nothing I can get hold of—nothing real. Only a dim sort of horror lying in wait for me as it were, threatening, terrible. . . . And it hurts to try any more. . . . I'm afraid, afraid of finding out. And yet, as long as I don't know, all these doubts will torture me!"

The psychology of the situation was outside the tranter's simple experience. Even the moral Widowson had no help for him, study him how he would. At length he brought out such homely comfort as seemed to him best to meet the case.

"My lad," he said, "maybe 'tes the Lard's way o' dealen wi' ye. Blotten out your sins even from your own mind. Maybe 'tes to lead 'ee to repentence an' to ask for pardon——"

"How can I repent of a sin that I may not have committed—ask pardon for an offence that may not lie to my charge?" cried the sufferer in his despair.

"It certainly seems a drawback, but no doubt the Almighty would make allowances."

Both men were roused. The voice, cool and faintly amused in tone, had come over their heads from the other side of the wall. Turning simultaneously, they saw that the speaker, a woman, was standing among the untidy graves in the churchyard. It was she who had stopped the tranter's cart on the fateful evening. Barjona Furmedge knuckled his forehead, and spoke her name.

She took no notice of him. Her eyes, beautiful and of a penetrating sadness, were fixed upon the younger man, while he, conscious of his bare throat, sat uneasy beneath her gaze.

"It is Demetrius Jordan, is it not?" she asked.

Still he remained silent. Seeing which, Furmedge answered up for him.

"Ay, ma'am, 'tes the young chap as I were tellen 'ee about."

"Cannot he speak for himself?" she inquired.

She moved forward through the rank weedy grass and pressed her bosom against the tombstones.

"Coome now," urged the tranter, "won't ye spake to the leädy?"

" He needn't be afraid," Mrs. Summerhayes went on. " I know all about him."

Demetrius looked up at last, met her gaze, found it not unfriendly, despite the curious half-mocking tones of the voice ; and, rising as though she had drawn him to his feet, came forward slowly.

" If you know all about me," he said, " you could tell me much that is hidden from me. I don't ask you to tell me, because I am not sure that I can bear to hear it yet."

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed.

" I understand you very well, Demetrius Jordan," she said. " I have been listening, you see. But my knowledge does not go as far as you think. I only meant to assure you that you need be at no pains to explain your sudden presence here. I am aware of your recent curious history ; that is all."

A look, almost of relief, certainly of diminished interest, crossed the young man's face. The woman noticed it, and smiled, but made no comment.

" I think you are still a little afraid of me," she said. " I assure you, young gentleman, that I am perfectly friendly. If you will come to my house, I will give you a tangible proof of my good will. Furmedge, have you finished your talk with him ? "

" 'Twas him as sart me, ma'am, if you please."

" I know ; I watched him pass my door. Well, have you two anything more to say ? "

" Not for my part, ma'am."

" You're glad to be rid of him, perhaps ? "

" I'd not goo as fur as to say that afore en, if I was, Mrs. Summerhayes. As 'tes, God knows, I'd dearly like to put a bit o' heart into him, an' help him along the path o' righteousness, howsomever scarlet be his sins, seein' as the hand o' the Lard be laid 'pon en for good so plain. Maybe he's like to Saul o' Tarsus, as were a chosen instrument called out in the midst o' his wickedness to be a shinen leäght."

Mrs. Summerhayes listened indifferently. Upon the depressed Demetrius, also, the stimulating analogy had no visible effect.

" I'll join you at the garden gate," said the lady, beginning to move away.

" You are very good," muttered the young man, his eyes on the ground.

The tranter clapped him on the shoulder.

" Goo with Mrs. Summerhayes, lad," he urged, " sence she be so bent on it. An' don't 'ee think to get rid o' thy sins otherwhere 'an in the Blood o' the Lamb."

" Are they my sins ? " demanded the other with a touch of his former passion. " You take it for granted that I'm the guilty creature I'm supposed to be ! But am I—am I ? Where's the answer to that ? "

" Are you coming ? " cried Mrs. Summerhayes, from the churchyard path.

" In a moment, ma'am," Barjona shouted back. " So soon as he've comforted his innerds wi' a drap o' cider."

" No need for that. I am going to give him some syllabub and bread and honey."

Under the apple trees Furmedge held out a work-stained, horny, and honest hand. Demetrius shook his head.

" Not until I'm sure," he said, and moved with his listless step to where Mrs. Summerhayes was waiting for him at the gate.

X

SYLLABUB AND POPPY-JUICE

THE house to which she took him lay but a stone's throw away from the tranter's cottage. It was a house of the better sort, the sole remaining possession of the family of Kellaway. Once, the property in land and cottages which lay spread around it had been its dependencies. Now, it stood merely to indicate the low-water mark of the same family's fortunes.

Situated a little way out of the main street, it was separated from the by-road by a small garden, now bright with mid-season flowers. A deep channelled stream meandered past its gateway. The house itself was in good repair, and preserved an aspect of unpretentious comfort—due in some measure to its well-thatched roof and solid brickwork. The front door was alcoved within a rounded portico, the roof of which was also covered with yellow thatch. The windows on either side were of small-paned glass, reaching to the ground and opening outward on to a neatly kept sward. A few melancholy shrubs and trees of dark hued foliage struck the one sombre note that seemed in keeping with the character and fortunes of the lonely woman who sheltered beneath the roof.

While traversing the few yards that separated Furmedge's home from her own, Annabella Summerhayes spoke easily to her companion on indifferent subjects. He, re-emerged into the world of men and women, and, not yet recovered from the paralysing effect of his peculiar position, was not sufficiently plastic to catch a mood of another's setting. If she had questioned him directly, he would have given stray answers. Some consciousness of this kept her tongue in the smooth ways of running narrative that needs no comment from the listener. A third person, astute enough to understand, would have gathered that her desire was to set him at his ease.

She led him into the house through one of the long casements,

thus introducing him into a well-ordered room of the feminine type. Herein the old and the new in furniture and ornaments were mingled with such judgment that the artistic harmony was equal to the comfort. It was obviously the abode of a refined woman who kept a place in her heart for the memory of old things.

With his entrance into the room Demetrius seemed to throw off some of the mental lethargy which so far had been the sole effect of his painful efforts to recapture the past. He looked about him with more interest in his surroundings than he had shown since Robert Crumpler had laid bare his antecedents with ungentle hand.

" Yes," said Mrs. Summerhayes, in response to his wandering glances, " this is my home. You are free to enter it whenever you please. Sit down. You are not strong yet, I see."

" Please tell me," said Demetrius, before accepting the chair that she indicated, " whether you do, in truth, know who I am ? "

" At least," she answered, " I know as much as you do yourself."

" That is saying very little."

" It is saying enough for the present. Please sit down."

He obeyed her, looking thoughtful.

" You only bewildered me the more."

" I did not bring you here in order to explain myself," she said, an elusive mocking look very apparent in her eyes as she regarded him.

" I hardly supposed that you did. But—why have you brought me here ? "

" To give you syllabub and honey."

" You are treating me like a child ! " he exclaimed with sudden petulance.

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed at him.

" Are you sure that you are much more ? " Then, " How does Mr. Crumpler treat you ? "

" He calls me his servant."

" And uses you as one ? "

" Not yet. But he says—to-morrow."

" I see. . . . So that is what you are to be in the future. Robert Crumpler's servant."

" I have not agreed as yet."

" But are going back to do so ! "

He flushed hotly, thereby giving his handsome face such an

air of boyish indignation and embarrassment that the woman laughed aloud in open appreciation of her own perceptiveness.

"I hoped," explained Demetrius, "that there would be no need for me to go back at all."

"That was why you came to question Furmedge?"

"Yes."

"And he has not helped you?"

"He has confirmed my fears."

"Your fears?"

"That Mr. Crumpler has told me the truth. Up to a certain point, I mean," he added with a touch of defiance.

"And that point is—Dorchester Gaol?"

He dropped his head in silence. In silence, also, Mrs. Summerhayes stretched out her hand—it bore a wedding-ring upon it—and lightly touched the oval patch upon the side of his head.

"It is true," she asked presently, breaking a long pause, "that you retain no memory—not even the slightest—of what happened before—Dorchester?"

He shook his head miserably.

"None."

"You have no recollection of the crime for which you suffered?"

"I tell you I know nothing! I forget it all!"

"Even the fact that you suffered a twofold agony before—you died?"

"What, in God's name, do you mean?"

"This." And in terse sentences she repeated the tranter's story, watching the horror steady and deepen in the young man's eyes as he listened.

When she had ended, he looked down again. Her voice went on with a coolness that was almost cruelty at that moment.

"If you are wishful to understand the facts of the trial," she said, "no doubt you can be easily satisfied. I cannot help you myself. I did not attend the court, and I never gossip with my neighbours. I knew all that I wanted to about the affair. But others are different—always agog for horrors. Some one, even Furmedge himself, may be able to enlighten you, if Mr. Crumpler has not already done so. Or there is the *County Chronicle's* report of the trial and——"

"For God's sake, madam," cried the unhappy Demetrius, "did you bring me here to torture me afresh?"

"No. I am your friend. Remember that, please."

"My friend!" He caught impulsively at the implication. "Then you believe that I am innocent of this monstrous thing!"

Mrs. Summerhayes shrugged her shoulders lightly, and rose to leave the room. He sprang after her.

"Tell me!" he pleaded. "In mercy, tell me! How much do you know?"

She turned in his grasp. She was quite grave now, and into her eyes had come a look of sympathy with his infinite distress. Again she stroked the white patch of hair that formed so strange a contrast to his youthful face.

"Poor lad!" she said. "I know nothing but what the verdict would imply. I never saw you until this day, although I stood near to you that night when you lay in the cart. If you wonder why I call myself your friend, say that I am a lonely woman who has strange fancies at times, or say that I, too, have suffered perhaps."

It might have been the truth; it might have been a lie. He had no more means of determining which it was than he had of forcing her to more candid speech. When his hands fell weakly from her, she slipped through the doorway, bidding him wait until her return.

She was back again in a few moments, bringing with her the promised refreshment, which she set before her guest in silence. When, in the perturbation of his emotions, he would have refused her hospitality, she urged it upon him with a gesture, and turned away to a small cabinet in a corner of the room.

Demetrius tasted the homely fare, and finding it good brought more appetite to it than he had thought possible. The wine in the syllabub sent a little colour into his face; and when he had finished he thanked her with a faint smile.

"That's better," she said, once more sitting down beside him. "Now tell me, do you yet believe that I am your friend?"

"You have acted as if you are," he answered. "Yes; I do believe it."

"That being so," the woman replied, satisfaction in her tones, "I can dare to give you a final proof of my goodwill—the proof of which I spoke. If you had doubted me, I should have feared a misconstruction."

"Please speak on."

"Forgive me if I am obliged to allude to a painful subject. Your position is abnormal. Of course, you understand that?"

He bowed his head, the blood red in his cheek again.

"Legally, you should be dead. Yet you are alive. You have not fulfilled your sentence. You have evaded it."

He blanched as suddenly as he had reddened.

"You mean that they can hang me again?"

"Your speech is blunter than mine, Mr. Jordan. 'Tis what I was trying to suggest."

He fell back, shivering perceptively. She looked at him with passionless eyes; then spoke:

"How the law precisely stands on this point, I cannot undertake to say. But, lest it should be as we fear, I give you now the means of circumventing the law in the most efficacious way. I cannot offer to save your life, should the law claim you again, but I can help to make your death an easy one."

She thrust her fingers into the pocket hanging from her waist, and opened them to disclose a small phial filled with a brown liquid. This she held out before the fascinated gaze of the young man at her side.

"What is it, madam?"

"A poison. Take it. Secrete it about you. Never part with it. Carry it always. There is enough to kill three men. But it is best to make certain; best to be sure. There! Put it away. The knowledge that you have it will comfort and sustain you in your miseries." She leant forward suddenly and laid her steady fingers on the phial. "I know!" she said. "I know! For there was a time when I carried it next my heart."

Demetrius sat fingering the little bottle curiously.

"You never needed it," he said, glancing up.

Mrs. Summerhayes met his look with one of almost superhuman intelligence. It was as though in that instant her brain was clashing across his.

"No. As you say, I never needed it," she answered abruptly. "Perhaps you will not, either. I hope that it may prove a useless gift. But, if ever they do come for you, swallow it down quickly. You will have no pain . . . only forgetfulness—or remembrance. Who can say?"

She rose after having watched him carefully hide the bottle away, and slipped back at once into her customary manner.

"And now," she said, "I think you had best be gone, or Mr. Crumpler will be vexed at your long absence. You are going back to him, I presume?"

"What else can I do?"

"Indeed, I cannot tell," she answered a little dryly. "After all, you are probably safer there than elsewhere. The place is remote, and Mr. Crumpler's habits prevent intrusion on the part of strangers."

"He claims me as his property; he would make me his servant."

"Then his servant you must be!"

"I suppose I must."

"After all, he saved your life."

"I wish I could feel more grateful!" cried Demetrius bitterly.

"It may come. I should be sorry to think that the best part of your life was over."

He looked at her wistfully, unable to rid himself of the impression that she could tell him more if she pleased, yet indisposed to bring direct charge of falsehood against one who had shown herself so friendly.

She took him out by the open window into the garden, and walked with him to the gate.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand.

This time Demetrius did not draw back. She seemed so much a woman beyond the ordinary standards. He let his hand fall into hers at once.

"Come again, if your master will let you," she said, the faint mockery playing round her lips again. "Use the present, and cease to worry over the hidden past. Well, what do you want to say?"

"Only this," he answered with a new firmness. "The past shall not remain hidden for ever. I am going to find out."

"What? And how?"

"My innocence; my guilt. Whichever it may be."

She mocked him across the gate.

"Is that quite wise?"

"It is quite honest."

"And how can you, with your limitations of mind and circumstance, set about the discovery?"

"By learning to understand myself," he answered, as he bent his head and turned away.

PART II

WHAT HE KNEW

XI

INTO SERVICE

AT the gateway of the Abbey when Demetrius reached it a yellow post-chaise stood glistening in the sun. A pair of sweating horses, a postboy gnawing the stock of his whip, and a couple of female figures made up a group sufficiently remarkable in its present environment. Beyond, one of the great wooden gates was being held open a few inches, and in the aperture appeared the acrimonious face and tousled hair of the sculptor.

As Demetrius approached, hidden from the old man's sight by the body of the chaise, the taller of the two women swept forward. Her carriage was magnificent.

"You really are the most unreasonable creature I ever met!" she declared, the plumes on her sky-blue bonnet nodding her indignation at him. "What's your objection, pray?"

"'Tis out of the bargain," Crumpler answered, eyeing her with so much open admiration that had the young lady's annoyance been less genuine she might have paused to suspect him of deliberately angering her.

"The bargain! Pshaw! There's no bargain that I know of. And what does it matter in any case?"

"I don't like strangers."

"Nonsense!" cried Josian rudely. "Hannah's only a servant. Servants don't count."

"When they're females they do. Always spying and gossiping and telling tales."

"Hannah doesn't. Do you, Hannah?"

She flashed round, an imperious figure in blue gown and white muslin spencer, upon her more plainly garbed attendant. And flashed back again upon the old man before the other woman had opened her mouth.

"My father told me——"

"Lies, I expect," chuckled Robert Crumpler. "Anyway,

there's your choice, my dear. Come in, or stay out, burn me if I care ! "

Josian shrugged her pretty shoulders, and turned her back on him. But flounced round again on hearing the door creak.

" Wait a moment ! " she cried. " Let me think for a minute, you miserable old sinner. Come here, Hannah. As for you," she ran on, denouncing the unoffending and impassive postboy, " you grinning jackanapes, if you dare to say a word, I'll not give you a sixpence above your charge, see if I do ! Now, Hannah ! "

She linked her arm in her companion's, and skirting the off wheel of the chaise came face to face with Demetrius.

" Oh, lor' ! "

She was rosy red in an instant, yet of the two the man was the most embarrassed. Fresh from his interview with Mrs. Summerhayes, his mind heavy with brooding, to have this radiant feminine creature flash suddenly into this newly awakened life of his was witnessing the glories of the aurora borealis across the gloom of a winter sky.

Josian recovered herself after the first appraising stare.

" Hannah," she said, " 'tis very evident this gentleman has been listening. I wonder if he can explain his presence here ? "

" I beg your pardon," said Demetrius, his eyes on the ground. " I was going in. That is all."

Josian gave a short laugh.

" Going in ? So was I, when the old gentleman stopped me. You'd better try your luck. Are you a visitor too ? "

" No, I live here."

" That's odd. I thought Mr. Crumpler lived alone. Well, it doesn't help us, sir, unless you can persuade the cantankerous old bag of bones to let us in."

" Miss Josian," cried the elder woman suddenly, " he's for shutting of the door ! "

" Botheration take him ! " And the girl dropped her companion's arm and whisked back to her old station, bright eyed and expostulating, where she confronted what remained visible of Robert Crumpler's visage.

" You must be reasonable," she assured him. " You can't expect me to do without a servant."

" You can have mine," was the impassive reply.

" You can't get over me like that," declared Josian with a stamp on the grass. " You know you haven't got one."

"Ho! Han't I? So much for your information, young lady. And him standing behind ye all the time."

Josian turned, and once more stared into Demetrius's abashed face.

"Oh, you!" she said. "Are you Mr. Crumpler's servant?"

"You have heard him call me so."

"Impossible! A stupid jest!" She addressed her uncle again. "You're trying to fool me. This is a young gentleman."

"He he! A pretty jest indeed! Tell her who you are," Crumpler chuckled.

Demetrius was silent.

"You're all crazy!" cried Josian, half-way into a rage. And happening at this moment to suspect a smile upon the postboy's wooden countenance she promptly flew at him and boxed his ears. Then she danced back, and continued her colloquy.

"This young man may suit your requirements," she said, with stately hauteur, while the postboy rubbed his red ears and swore aloud, "but he won't do for mine."

"He's not a man, if that's what your modesty's afraid of. He's only a servant. Servants don't count. Lord love me, 'tis what you said yourself a minute since."

"Whatever it is," cried the exasperated Josian, "it's not a woman, and I'm not going to have my gowns hooked up by anything less."

"D'ye think ye can hook up this young lady's gowns?" Crumpler asked of Demetrius.

"I don't know," said the young man with a frown.

"Upon my word——" cried the owner of the gowns, and suddenly two pairs of eyes met. Instantly the feminine mood changed. "They hook up down the back," she informed him, coquettishly indicating the prosaic nature of the performance. "But I'm very impatient and can't bear to stand long."

Demetrius stood tongue-tied and bewildered, and was glad enough when the aggrieved postboy, keeping out of arm's length of his fair passenger, created a diversion by sudden speech:

"Plaze'm, I 'ave to be getten back along. Be you wanten the chay any more?"

"Yes, no, wait a moment!" cried the distracted Josian. "Plague take this servant of yours! He's driven every idea

out of my head. Is your mind quite fixed, sir, not to let me come in unless I come alone ? "

" Devil burn me, han't I been telling ye so for the last half-hour ? Mighty thick i' the skull you womenfolk be, it seems. Your mother was the only sensible one I ever knew—until she fell in with your knave of a father ! "

" How dare you, you insulting old man ! I'll go back at once—I'll——"

" Ay, ay, my dear ! Go back to him, and see if he'll thank ye for it ! "

The gibe acted as a fillip to the girl's spirit. There was deep underlying truth in it. If she was to serve her father and—which seemed at this moment still more alluring—to outwit this detestable relative of hers, she could not afford to take offence at his diatribes. Accordingly, she turned to her woman, and issued her orders with an excess of dignity to cover the seeming humiliation of this enforced submission :

" Hannah, you will return in the chaise to the village. Wait for me there, and be ready to carry out any instructions I may send you. Put up at the inn, and don't associate with the village people."

Pretending not to see the malicious triumph which contorted the sculptor's face, discovering a thousand fresh wrinkles, Josian proceeded, in an aloof manner, to superintend the unstrapping of her boxes from the back of the chaise. But when the postboy lifted the first to bear it within the gates, another set-back was given to her.

" He don't come in here," Crumpler cried quickly. " Not a toe-mark of him. Set 'em down, lad, and cut off at once, d'ye hear ? "

" Yes, go," said Josian at once, to avoid another humiliating capitulation. And, the settlement having been made, the yellow vehicle drove off in the sunlight. Then, and only then, did a single door of the gateway open wide for the girl's admittance.

" Come in, niece," said the old man, grown amiable with victory. " Demetrius'll fetch in your things."

There were four fair-sized travelling boxes, two bandboxes, and two large valises.

Demetrius, after a moment's hesitation, bent down and shouldered one of the boxes. This was, in effect, the first act of service he had performed for Robert Crumpler, and by its

execution he tacitly acknowledged himself to be the sculptor's servant.

The distance from the gateway to the Tower was in itself inconsiderable. But the boxes were heavy, and Demetrius not yet fully recovered from his illness. By the time that all Josian's property was safely conveyed to the house he was staggering and gasping painfully. As he stood leaning against the door-post, wiping his forehead with the cuff of his shirt, the young lady herself came out of the house and saw him. If Demetrius had possessed the ordinary characteristics of a country servant, Josian would not have spared a thought for his labour, but the young man was not only strikingly well-featured, but presented several unusual points of interest. Josian stopped accordingly.

"Thank you," she said with a smile.

"You are surely welcome," he made answer.

Josian frowned. It was scarcely the reply to be expected from a domestic to his master's guest. Demetrius himself she noticed seemed unaware of any undue familiarity.

"Are you what you pretend to be?" she asked suddenly, and watched his obvious discomfiture with interest.

"I am what you see," he answered, after a slight pause. "I don't know what pretence you think me guilty of."

"Are you Mr. Crumpler's servant?"

"Yes."

Josian looked away pettishly. She was not convinced.

"Only a servant? But I thought my uncle had none."

"He has myself. No one else."

"Oh! And how long have you been here?"

"About three weeks, I believe."

"You believe! Don't you know?" she asked him sharply.

"Mr. Crumpler will tell you."

"Save me!" cried the girl. "Are you quite a fool?"

He made no reply to that. Josian ran her shrewd appraising eyes over him from top to toe. Finding his person too attractive to be ignored and his manner too studied to be exciting, she endeavoured to sting whatever susceptibilities he might be hiding under his quiet exterior.

"You'll never be a good servant until you learn a proper respect for your superiors," she told him. "You need a vast deal of training. Your present manner may suit Mr. Crumpler, but it doesn't suit me. Why don't you call me 'Miss' or 'Madam' when you speak to me?"

" I beg your pardon, madam."

Josian laughed ; a little derisively.

" Good boy ! " she cried. " We'll make a decent servant of you in time, no doubt. Oh, and there's another thing. If you must wear powder, which seems out o' place in the country, why do you wear it in one spot on the side of your head ? It makes you look ridiculous."

Demetrius shrank back, moistening dry lips. Across the girl's jeering tones the old man's voice struck from the open doorway :

" You might so well ask him why, since he's sweating from carrying your baggage, miss, he don't loosen his cravat a bit."

" Yes," said Josian, turning back to Demetrius, " why don't you ? "

The words dried upon her lips. The young man's hand had flown to his throat, and hung there trembling, while upon his pale face had come a look of infinite dread and pain.

" In mercy, sir," he pleaded, " spare me a little, and I will do all you wish ! "

" He he ! " laughed Crumpler. " So that's it, is it ? Well, well, 'tis a good thing to know the whip that stings ye most. Come along in. I want a few words with ye."

But a woman's curiosity had to be reckoned with first.

" No, but why is it ? " she demanded, her eyes fixed on the young man's distressed face.

He made no reply in words, but implored her with a look. Then, to his surprise, the sculptor kept faith with him.

" Let him alone, niece," he bade. " Can't 'ee see he's shy with ladies ? Well, then, 'tis this. He had an accident to his throat t'other day, and the scar isn't nice to see. Now mind your own business, and thank the Lord you've got a pretty head on your shoulders, my dear."

The insinuation was pointed enough to silence the girl, although it was no part of her policy to admit a knowledge of her father's interest in her visit. She drew away, biting her red lips, and followed the two men only with her eyes.

Crumpler led Demetrius away in silence, taking him in the direction of the tower itself. A heavy door, thickly studded with nails, like those at the gateway, gave entrance. The sculptor unlocked it with a key carried about him, and threw it open. The result was startling in the extreme, for whereas, judging by the narrow lights of the windows, an ecclesiastical gloom was to

be expected within the building, the eye was met at once by a pellucidness of atmosphere which rendered it almost as radiant as the sunshine without. This effect was due to the fact that the centre of the ceiling was glazed and open to the sky, although the tower itself possessed an upper story in the shape of a wooden gallery which compassed the circular skylight.

The ground floor formed the studio, and was littered on all sides with the materials of his craft, The dust of plaster which had been chipped off a decade ago lay over everything. The original flooring of oak was hidden beneath the rubble of marble and Portland stone until it resembled a mason's yard. In one corner stood a giant block of unwrought marble ; in another, vast tubs of clay and plaster. A carpenter's bench was piled high with candle-ends. The centre of the floor was occupied by a dusty throne, on which stood at present an unfinished model shrouded in a wet cloth. Masks and other anatomical casts hung on walls and depended from easels, together with mallets, chisels, and callipers. On a small deal table stood an exquisitely modelled wax bust of classic design, while one or two modern copies of the antique served as stands for modelling cloths, or the long soiled smocks which the old man wore when at work. At the far end of the room were a small brazier and cauldron which were used for melting the wax when Crumpler wrought in that material. At present the pot was empty and laid aside, but the fire was alight, and into the glowing coals had been thrust a length of twisted wire.

Crumpler eyed the young man for a while in silence. But his lean cheeks were working with amusement. At length he spoke :

" You came back, then ? "

" Yes," said Demetrius.

" You're to call me master."

" Yes ; master."

" Ho ho ! That sounds well and proper. I knew you'd come back. If I hadn't known it, I'd never have let you go off so readily."

" I suppose not."

" Where have you been ? "

" To the village. To Barjona Furmedge, as I told you I should."

" And got small satisfaction, I reckon, from him ! Where else did ye go ? "

Demetrius hesitated. There had been so much of the con-

fidential in the interview with Mrs. Summerhayes that to speak intimately of it was like betraying a trust.

" Come now, no secrets from your master ! " Crumpler said. " Been up to mischief already, you young rip—tattling, drinking, quarrelling, eh ? "

" No. Mrs. Summerhayes spoke to me—that is all."

" Mrs. Summerhayes—the woman who ran away to get married and came back alone ! Spoke to you, did she ? That's odd, too, for I hear she speaks to none. Maybe she wants a servant or another lover ! Is that all ? "

" That's all I did," said Demetrius a little sullenly.

" Very well. Now hearken to me. In future you'll not be let out unless I need something from the village. 'Tisn't much I do need, as 'Jona mostly brings things along. And I'll have a bit more ground dug up and cultivated now you're here."

" Do you expect me to dig ? "

" I do. Wherefore not ? Too nice to do it, eh ? You just remember that 'Jona 'ud ha' been digging your grave if it han't been for me, and naught to token you by save a twisted mask. Well ? "

" Go on."

" I'm not going to pay ye wages, because if I do you'd be making off and I'd spend valuable time chasing you through Dorset."

" I don't want money," said Demetrius with proud lips.

" That's well, for, as I say, you're not going to get any. You'll have your food, and a few clothes when your own wear out, and if that's not enough for you, you can go and ask 'em at Dorchester Gaol if they need another man about the place."

Demetrius winced and made no comment.

" Well," demanded the sculptor, " aren't you satisfied ? "

" I have told you, sir, that I am."

" Good again. You can tell Barjona, next time he calls, to fetch you a couple of shirts from the town. Same sort as he wears himself. And he can get one of the village women to knit ye some worsted stockings."

Demetrius glanced down at the grey silk ones which covered his shapely limbs.

" Thank you, sir," he said.

" Now as to your duties," Crumpler went on. " You're to cook, and fetch and carry, draw water, 'tend to the stables—there's a horse and a couple of cows—milk and churn, and see

to the garden. I want plenty of flowers grown, for I need 'em in my work. If you don't know how to do anything, I'll show ye —once. If you forget after that, I shall beat you for your stupidity. Understand ?' '

" I shall not forget."

" Nothing like the fear of a sore back to make a lad remember, he he ! You can live in the gatehouse, and be ready to open to 'Jona when he comes."

" I'll be ready."

" A very proper spirit ! Now, can ye read, or hast forgotten how along with t'other things ? "

" No. I've not forgotten that."

Crumpler crossed the room and returned with a sheet of printed paper in his hand.

" Here's something, then, for you to study at your leisure," he said, and thrust the sheet upon the young man. " Read it out," he bade.

And Demetrius, after a glance at the emblematic figure at the head of the page, read :

> A trusty servant's portrait would you see,
> This figure well survey, who'er you be ;
> The porker's snout not nice in diet shows ;
> The paddock shut, no secret he'll disclose.
> Patient, to angry lords the ass gives ear ;
> Swiftness on errand the stag's feet declare ;
> Laden his left hand, apt to labour saith ;
> The coat, his neatness ; the open hand his faith.
> Girt with his sword, his shield upon his arm,
> Himself and master he'll protect from harm

" Ah ! " said Crumpler, when he had ended. " There's sound sense in that, isn't there, eh ? "

The miserable Demetrius was flushed with mortification, but being fixed by the piercing eyes of his companion, and dreading further insolence and threats, forced himself to agree—even to place the paper in a pocket as though for reperusal. But the painfulness of the interview had now reached a pitch which he could scarcely endure, and he asked, respectfully but firmly, whether he might withdraw.

" In a minute, in a minute," Crumpler told him. " There's one thing more. Open your shirt."

" Why ? "

" Obedience ! " thundered the old man fiercely.

"If I understood——" began Demetrius, thinking fearfully of the phial which Mrs. Summerhayes had given to him, and prepared to defend it, even by a struggle with Crumpler.

"Good! You shall."

The sculptor crossed to the brazier and drew thence the length of twisted metal. The end was red hot.

"D'ye understand now?"

Demetrius drew back shuddering. The old man was between him and the door.

"Do as I bid you!"

"But why? How have I angered you? I have accepted all your conditions, promised all you wished!"

"Obey me!"

"I won't. I haven't deserved it. I——"

"'Tis not a punishment, you young fool! 'Tis to stamp ye as my lawful property, same as any other cattle, so that men'll know you for mine if you try to run away."

"I shan't try to run away!" Demetrius cried desperately. "I'll be faithful without that! I swear I will!"

"Come!" said the inexorable old man. "Your breast to me, or your throat to the lady."

"You can't force me to bare either!"

"Can't I? What's to hinder me from posting off to Dorchester and telling the Governor who and where you are? A servant who won't obey is no good to me."

Demetrius shivered and began slowly to unfasten his shirt.

"There!" Crumpler said, a moment or so later. "*T.S.* for Trusty Servant. Go and put a greasy rag over it and 'twill cicatrize in no time on good healthy flesh like yours."

Demetrius staggered to the doorway, and gathering up his strength ran wildly into the farthest recesses of the grounds, and flinging himself down upon the grass lay there alone in his pain and misery for a long time.

XII

HAIL, FELLOW! WELL MET!

IN matters of penmanship Josian Trehane did not shine. As a consequence she was in no great hurry to report to her father the fact of her safe arrival at the Tower of the Winds. Thus a full week elapsed before she performed her duty in this respect, and not until ten days after the event did Trehane become aware of it.

Another individual learnt the news half an hour in advance of the Home Secretary.

The weather was warm, and on this particular morning young Silas Drenchard was in a more than usually indolent mood. Therefore, any work, even the least arduous, became anathema to his soul. Fancying the world against him, in that work of some sort was necessary to his existence, he, like most weak-natured persons, proceeded to put himself against the world. The result was a bad temper of considerable length, and breadth. In a more or less degree, this was his chronic mood, but as a rule his genuine awe of his chief kept him within bounds in that quarter. This day found him almost ready to risk his undoubtedly good position by falling foul of Trehane himself.

In person he was not attractive, and the commonplace cast of his features was rendered less engaging by the habitual sulkiness of his expression. His figure was full and lumpish, his taste in dress somewhat loud and extravagant, his manner indicative of his underlying resentment that fate, after giving him an ancient name, should have omitted to throw a fortune after him.

He sat alone in the Home Secretary's private room, and after having idled away three-quarters of an hour condescended to turn his attention to the pile of letters that lay on his chief's table. Trehane was unusually late. Even the careless mind of his secretary had grasped the fact that he was out of health—irritable and nervous to a degree, exacting in detail, mordacious in reproof. The man's looks, too, had altered. He had grown

haggard and worn. His pallid complexion had the unwholesome tint of old ivory; his hands had lost some of their steadiness. In truth, the under officials expected Sir John Trehane to plead illness and to retire temporarily from the scene of his labours. For no one guessed how strong were the chains of private interest which bound him to the official table.

Having passed in review a number of missives varying in importance from a communication from a fellow Minister to an obsequious letter from a mendicant place-seeker, Drenchard took up a wrapper of indifferent paper execrably sealed, and addressed in a scrawling unformed hand. He opened it as a mere matter of form, prepared to toss it aside as unworthy of the meal which he was preparing for the lion, his master. But the letter penned on the inside of the wrapper, though carelessly written and ill-spelt, he found extremely interesting. The heading claimed his attention immediately. The letter was dated from his stepfather's house in Dorset.

At the first glance impatience moved him; then cupidity. The old man was ill, and clamouring to see him. Curse his idiotic attachment! Ah! to be sure, illness, even a slight attack in summer-time, sometimes led to death, and the old man was past seventy. Lord, how wealthy the old dotard must be, in spite of his whinings about neglect and poverty! And the Tower might be made a very decent residence for a smart country gentleman. Well! . . .

He brought his eyes back to the sheet in his hand, and starting at "Dear Sir," read down to the "Josian Trehane" in the bottom corner. Then he laid it down and whistled.

The letter told very little to anyone. In effect, it was merely the announcement of the young lady's arrival, with a few girlish comments on the appearance of the house and its owner. Josian's discretion was not at fault. Her sole error of judgment was in forwarding her letter to her father's official residence instead of to his house in St. James's. A mistake not unnatural to one who had hitherto held no correspondence with her father. And of Demetrius Jordan there was no mention at all.

But meagre as the missive was it fermented a grievance in the unwholesome mind of the present reader. The two had never met, and to Silas Drenchard's perception it was plain that this was a deliberate intention on the part of the girl's father. Moreover, the fact of Trehane's daughter being domiciled at the Tower of the Winds, as the guest of his stepfather was

sufficiently odd to arouse curiosity and speculation in the mind of Drenchard. Apparently the affair had been preconcerted, yet no word of the arrangement had been dropped by Trehane to him.

"Damn his closeness!" Drenchard muttered. "Cunning old fox! I've a mind to get even with him by taking a squint at this precious girl of his without his knowledge. Ugh! London's a damned hot plaguy sort of a place in the summer."

Very thoughtfully he put Josian's letter into his pocket instead of laying it with the rest upon Trehane's table. By the time that his chief entered the room he had arranged his plans and was prepared to carry them out. As nothing as a rule can be obtained without sacrifice of some sort, Drenchard, from motives of prudence, was obliged to work more assiduously and to evince a greater readiness to please throughout the day. At the close of it, having thus contrived to get through several hours without receiving a single reproof, he made his request with becoming diffidence and civility.

"You mean that you want a holiday," Trehane said when the young man had ended. "Your vacation isn't due yet awhile. You know that."

"Certainly, sir. But I hoped that I might be spared for a few days now."

Trehane considered. There was a short pause.

"Why do you want specially to go now?" he asked with disconcerting sharpness.

"For no particular reason, sir. Only because——"

"You've a general dislike to work, I suppose?"

"Not at all, sir, I assure you. I'm proud and happy to serve under you. But the truth is my head's not as clear as I could wish——"

"Nor as I could wish, either!"

"A little vapourish, sir. Liver, no doubt. My physician recommends sea air. A few days at Brighthelmstone. I'd be my own man inside a week, sir."

As chance had it, the request was not ill-timed. Public business was slack, and the young man, for all the value he was, might easily be spared. But it was scarcely these considerations which moved the Home Secretary to a favourable deliberation on Drenchard's request. Rather it was because his natural dislike to Crumpler's stepson had grown these latter days into a feeling akin to abhorrence. To be quit of the fellow with his

sulky suspicious manner and foxy eyes, even for a short period, offered a prospect of comparative relief to the nerve-racked man at the head of the table. So acute had his susceptibility become that the mere presence of the young man had grown into an offence, a menace, a daily cause of torment. His desire grasped at the chance of a temporary respite while his judgment still pondered the matter.

Presently he raised his eyes to where Drenchard was waiting patiently for his decision.

"I have no doubt the matter could be arranged," he said. "More easily now than later on, perhaps. You can see Bond about it. If he can spare one of his clerks in your absence, you can take a month. If not, you cannot go."

"Thank you, sir."

A couple of days later, Drenchard received formal permission to absent himself from his post for one month. In his desire, apparently, to prove himself worthy of the special concession, he remained at work, on the last day, some time after Trehane had left the premises. But his work was of an unusual nature and consisted in forcing open one of the Home Secretary's private drawers by means of an ingeniously twisted piece of wire, and inserting Josian's letter—until now kept strictly in his own possession—between the side of the drawer and a bundle of papers. The arrangement did him credit. The appearance, when he had finished, was of a thin sheet of paper which had slipped into an open drawer and become overlooked in the press of bulkier documents until some disarrangement had revealed it. For the rest, the Home Secretary had only his own reprehensible carelessness to blame when he found the repository unlocked.

There was nothing now to keep young Drenchard longer in town. With pleasurable anticipation he set his face towards Dorset, and, having booked his seat overnight, took his stand in the early hours of a fine July morning before the *Golden Cross* at Charing Cross, which was the starting-point for the Eclipse coach to Exeter.

The coach was scheduled to start at half-past seven, and it was not more than three minutes past the hour. Drenchard had already disposed of an early breakfast, and had nothing to do but to keep an eye on his baggage and to stare buckishly at the few women who chanced to be abroad. Other intending passengers strolled up, gave each other good day, or ominously appraised one another's chances of the best seats. From inside

the yard the first sounds of activity lent some air of possibility to the notion of the coach's being less than a half-hour late in starting. Bets as to the time occupied in making the journey were freely given and taken, and Drenchard was devoting his attention to this weighty matter, when it was suddenly diverted by a touch on his arm. Looking round, he found a ragged fellow standing at his elbow.

"Eh? What d'ye want? Be off with you!" he ordered roughly, and was moistening his pencil over his betting-book anew, when a dirty piece of paper was thrust between the two. He glared down at it, and involuntarily read his own name.

"Gent waitin' to see your honour jest round the corner," whispered a beery voice in his ear.

"Gent? What gentleman do you mean, you rascal?" he demanded, still staring at the grimy piece of paper, which had, despite its forlorn appearance, a certain familiarity about the handwriting which set him wondering.

"Dunno, your honour. Very fine gent waiting round the corner. Gave me fippence to give your honour this 'ere. P'inted you out to me 'alf a minute ago."

"Damnation!" muttered Drenchard, his mind reverting to possible duns and dues. But he took the paper in a gingerly way and turned aside to read it.

It was brief, merely four lines. It ran:

"My dear Sly,

"Follow the bearer and come to see an old friend. *Ride si sapis.*"

Drenchard frowned, tore the slip of paper into a dozen fragments, and turned to the man who was still waiting.

"Tell your master to go to the devil, it he hasn't got there already," he said. "I'm not coming."

The man was slinking off, when Drenchard's expression suddenly changed. A dull red flush suffused his sallow skin, and with some eagerness he opened his hand which still held the torn pieces of paper. Smoothing out one or two of the scribbled fragments, he examined them carefully. His heavy eyes brightened.

"By God!" he muttered softly, and hurried at once after the retreating figure of the messenger.

"Stop!" he called, and when he drew level he continued:

" Take me to the man who sent you, if it isn't far. Oh, by the Lord, I'm forgetting my baggage."

He hastened back, made arrangements for the safety of his property during his temporary absence, and rejoining the man followed him down one of the smaller streets into an alley of unsavoury aspect and mean proportions. By the time that he was beginning to question the prudence of proceeding farther with the adventure, his guide stopped and turned in at an open doorway.

" Here ? " asked the dubious Drenchard, one foot on the threshold.

Then he stepped into a dingy passage, and found himself staring at a half-closed door. His guide jerked his thumb at the aperture, and disappeared.

Drenchard knocked, and slid a cautious eye round the corner. From inside a man rose up to meet him.

" Come in, Sly," he called. " You've been a devilish long time getting here."

Drenchard entered and fixed the other man with a long stare. The owner of the room laughed.

" Sit down, my boy, and make yourself at home. I'm sorry I can't offer you a drink, but there's nothing in this cursed hole, as you see. Well, haven't you done staring ? "

Drenchard subsided into a broken chair, and drew a long breath.

" So ! It is you ! " he exclaimed slowly.

" Surprised, eh ? "

" Absolutely ! I thought you——"

" Weren't in England ! " interrupted the other. " Of course you did ! So do lots of people, and between ourselves, my dear Sly, I'm not anxious to undeceive 'em. 'Tisn't every one I'd trust like you."

Drenchard swore softly. He was recovering from his astonishment, but slowly. He sat gnawing his forefinger, still staring at his former friend.

" I don't understand it," he said bluntly.

The other waved his hand airily. It was a smooth white hand, delicate as a woman's.

" Your wits always were somewhat slow," he remarked. " Never mind that now. The points are these : here I am, and there you are—a rare combination, my dear Sly, which results in—what ? "

"Damned if I can guess, unless you want something out of me," Drenchard returned uncivilly. "In any case, you must be quick about it, for my coach starts in twenty minutes' time."

"That's odd, now," remarked his friend. "So does mine."

"'Tisn't likely to be the same," was the uneasy retort.

"That depends. Where are you bound for?"

"Down West." Drenchard gave the information unwillingly.

"Odd again! So am I!"

"Hang it all, I don't believe it!"

"As you please! You'll see in twenty minutes' time."

The speaker lounged back in his chair, stretching out his legs over the dirty floor. The place was obviously a mean lodging house, grim and poverty-racked. The man who occupied it had the air of a broken-down disciple of fashion who still retained enough refined insolence and effrontery to enable him to rise again. His dress was good, too good for his surroundings, and more tasteful than Drenchard's own. His manners were quiet and easy, his assurance superlative. His voice was soft and pleasant to listen to; he was handsome, too, with bold black eyes and fine features; and well-ordered in his person, from the neatly fitting riding boot upon his foot to the short length of black whisker upon his cheek. Beside his superior airs, young Drenchard had already dropped into the country lout which at heart he was.

"By the way," remarked his friend, as Drenchard still sat frowning and staring at him, "I haven't introduced myself, I think."

"What's the need?" asked the other. "I know you well enough, though I never expected to see you again. I recognized your writing after I'd conned it over."

"I subscribed the old club motto to reassure you, lest you should fear a trick."

"I very nearly did. I've left the club."

"You amaze me! Such a very popular member as you must have been! Why?"

"The play was too high," muttered Drenchard, reddening.

"My dear Sly! It was never high enough for me. You all played like damned greengrocers."

Drenchard got to his feet.

"I must be going," he said. "Coach starts in a few minutes."

"No such hurry—a quarter yet, if you're booked on the Eclipse. You are? My coach: singular, very! We'll be able to travel in company."

"I should have thought," said Drenchard with an odd look, "that you'd had enough of coaches."

"Stop that, Sly! Stop that at once!" cried the other. Then, as Drenchard subsided, "I was going to tell you my name. It's Jermyn, Lawrence Jermyn. Like it, my buck?"

"I wonder how many names you've had in your time?" said the other with a kind of surly admiration.

"My godfathers and godmothers certainly had a varied taste. However, this one happens to be my own. The fact is, it had got so buried beneath a pile of more famous ones, that I thought I couldn't do better than bear it like an honest man. Ingenious, eh?"

"Damme, yes. I must be going."

"Curse me if you're not the most incurious fellow I ever met. Isn't there anything you want to know?"

"Oh, lots. But I mustn't miss——"

"It's always late in starting. Besides, there's the Accommodation this afternoon, or the Weymouth Union, either of which will do as well."

"But I must——"

"So must I! Don't distress yourself. I saw you half an hour ago at the *Golden Cross*. Lucky chance! Pam always turns up for me. Says I—'My fortune's made!' And here you are."

"Why didn't you speak, then, if you saw me at the inn?"

"Hush!" cried Jermyn, raising a long white finger sparkling with gems. "You're a lucky dog if you can't guess why. 'Twas mighty incautious of me to venture out in daylight at all. But I was so devilish hungry, and there's pickings round the coffee stalls sometimes——"

"You don't look poor."

"Meaning this?"—with a wave of the hand over his well-clad person. "And these?" indicating the rings. "Dress is a poor and penniless vagabond's sole asset, and as such must be maintained."

A wry smile twisted the corners of Drenchard's mouth.

"You haven't changed a whit," he said. "You're just the same insinuating dog as ever."

"Faith, I should hope so!" exclaimed his friend, rising and beginning to poke about the dusty corners from which he presently produced a hat, a pair of gloves, and a walking-stick.

"There's one thing puzzles me, though," Drenchard said as he watched him. "That little business that made all the stir, you know. How did you manage it? What really happened?"

"Fate, fortune, Providence, whatever you like, managed it, not I. And a devilish sight better! Nothing could have fitted in more accommodatingly with my necessities. Shall we make a move?"

Drenchard was looking serious.

"They hanged a man," he said slowly.

"Matravers; poor devil; yes."

"You knew? But that wasn't the name."

"Jordan, perhaps?"

"Jordan. Yes. Same fellow?"

Jermyn nodded, and fitted on his gloves with great nicety.

"I was rather sorry for him," he said, compressing his lips, either with emotion or because the gloves were tight. "But I couldn't save him. I thought, though, that he might have got off. And he would have done so, I believe, only old Paradelle was against him all through. I read a report of the trial."

"Why was that?"

"Paradelle? Well, you see, the judge was an old enemy of Matravers's father, and no doubt he was glad of the chance of working off his spleen on the son."

"The Matraverses of Worth Matravers? I remember. It was Sir Lucius's son who was hanged, then?"

"Of course. He dropped the family name when he came to town after his father shot himself. Pleasant young fellow he was too. I was just trying teaching him how to go to the devil in a gentlemanly way when my own affairs got rather involved, and I had to disappear. Wasn't he recommended to mercy?"

"Perhaps. I didn't follow the trial. There was some talk of a reprieve, the evidence being so circumstantial, but it didn't come off."

"Ah, well," said Jermyn, leading the way from the room, "no doubt he got to the devil more quickly that way than under my tutelage. He wasn't a very apt pupil. There were several prejudices to be broken down, and I doubt if I should ever have made a first class sinner of him. . . . He made a decent end, I heard, but I should have expected that of him. Thank the Lord, I'm a generous man, and have forgiven him our little quarrel since he did me so good a turn."

Drenchard shot a quick look at the speaker.

"Ah, you mean——"

"Never mind what I mean," Jermyn interrupted, linking his arm amicably in his friend's. "Mum's the word. I never talk of private matters in the open street. Where are you going, did you say? Down into Dorset?"

"Home," said Drenchard laconically.

"Ah! there's the coach nearly ready to start. Two places vacant, I see. My luck again!"

"What? I thought you said you'd booked a seat?"

"Your error, Sly. I couldn't have said that, because I haven't. But it's no odds, as there's a place empty."

They walked a few paces in silence. When they neared the inn, Drenchard, who had grown proportionally sulky as his companion's jauntiness increased, muttered a few words about seeing after his baggage, and hurried inside.

When he emerged, followed by an inn servant carrying his valises, he found that the confusion incidental to the departure of a popular coach had been augmented by an altercation which was in progress on the pavement. In the centre of a small crowd made up of ostlers, passengers who had clambered down again, and loiterers, Jermyn's tall figure was easily discerned.

Drenchard's first thought was that his friend had been recognized and he himself about to be relieved of his unwanted company through the medium of the law. He was pressing in curiously on the outskirts of the crowd, when Jermyn caught sight of him.

"Ah," he said with a wonderful irradiation of his former gloomy countenance, "my friend—my good friend! My dear Drenchard, please come here!"

The spectators parted to let the unwilling Drenchard through. As soon as he was within arm's reach Jermyn clutched him with more force than affection and drew him to his side.

"Well, what's the matter now?" asked the young man surlily.

"My dear fellow, I find I've been robbed!"

Drenchard laughed maliciously.

"Better go to Bow Street," he suggested, "and tell 'em all about it."

"But I haven't time! 'Tis most important for me to get to Exeter to-night. The rogue's welcome to the money, only—there's the coach fare, you see."

"I see," Drenchard admitted gloomily.

"Take your places, gentlemen!" roared the guard.

Glancing up, Drenchard saw that the coachman was already climbing up to his seat, while the ostlers were hanging on to the leaders' heads, ready to let go at the word. A general stampede of intending travellers followed the warning cry.

Drenchard swore under his breath.

"If I might beg the favour of a loan," said Jermyn, loud enough for the others to hear. "Five guineas will do it. 'Tis really most important. As between friends, you see. One moment, coachee! Five shillings for one minute's grace! My friend, Mr. Drenchard of His Majesty's Home Office, will accommodate me gladly."

Drenchard reviewed the situation rapidly and savagely. To decline meant to stamp himself as an ungenerous fellow who would be regarded with contempt by his companions for the next six or eight hours; to altercate meant the probable loss of the coach and the forfeiture of his own fare. There was nothing for it but to yield with what grace he could muster.

Accordingly, he handed over the five guineas, and swung himself up to the roof in a sour humour. Jermyn kept the coach waiting for an incredibly short time, and joined him a few moments later, taking a seat immediately behind him. The coachman gathered up the reins, the guard raised the horn, the passengers held on to their seats.

"Let 'em go!" from the coachman.

"Tantarara-rara-rara!" from the horn.

"Only just in time!" from Jermyn in Drenchard's ear.

"Oh, damme!" from Trehane's secretary, beneath his breath.

The Exeter coach had started on its way.

XIII

THE TOUCH

JOSIAN TREHANE, that careless maid, was in no way perturbed by her father's tardy response to her letter. As the days passed and brought no word from him, she concluded that he had left her to pursue whatever line of conduct her own judgment might dictate. Such a supposition fitted in well enough with her mood, which leaned towards leisureliness.

The whole affair was to her an adventure, a pleasurable piece of excitement in the monotony of her easy life, and as such she enjoyed it. While not forgetful of the reason of her visit to the Tower—her delight in her implied responsibility prevented that—she had lost to some extent the keen sense of her father's danger which had impressed her while in his presence. The very circumstance of his apparent delay in acknowledging her letter assured her that as yet his position had been unassailed.

"Plenty of time," she thought cheerfully; and, since she could hardly be expected to spend every moment of her time in furtive rummaging among the heterogeneous lumber in her uncle's house, she looked round in her spare hours for the means of amusing herself.

It was in this somewhat doubtful capacity that Demetrius Jordan unwittingly offered his various peculiarities for her consideration. Despite her provincial upbringing and utter inexperience of the world, Josian was not long in discovering that a mystery of some sort surrounded her uncle's only servant.

This was sufficient in itself to move the interest of an idle girl. And when the object of it was a young and good-looking member of the opposite sex there was no likelihood of her attention waning until some counter-attraction presented itself; which would naturally produce the crisis, when her interest in Demetrius must either deepen or decline.

But in these sunny days of July all this was in the future. The servant amused her—in the more literal sense of the word

as well as in its broader application. She came upon him once seated astride a bench before a wooden washing-tub. He was aproned like a woman and with arms bared to the elbows was dabbling Crumpler's shirts in a lather of soap-suds. Josian had approached from behind, and finding something ludicrous in the unconscious figure absorbed in the womanly occupation she laughed aloud. Demetrius swung round as in a saddle, his face red with shame.

Josian was pleased. His usual impenetrability irked her oddly. She drew nearer, the derision still lurking about her mouth and eyes.

"Good morning, Mr. Washerwoman," she said. "I hope you are using plenty of soap."

The young man, his cheek slowly cooling, turned back to his task. Josian stood at his shoulder, and noticed the shapeliness of the half-immersed fingers.

"Why don't you answer me?" she demanded sharply as he bent over his work in silence.

"What do you wish me to say?"

"Oh, anything, booby! Do you like doing that?"

"No."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Because Mr. Crumpler told me to."

"Do you always do what you're told? I don't. How dull your life must be!"

"I don't mind that. I like it quiet."

"So I should think! What a softy you are! You haven't the spirit of a wood-louse."

Demetrius went on with his work as before. His silence still further provoked the girl.

"Have you?" she asked with a little stamp of the foot. "Why don't you answer me?"

"I beg your pardon——"

"Miss!"

"Miss, but I didn't know you asked me anything."

"Neither did I. Why should I? What in the world could I learn from you?"

She had achieved her object at last. The parti-coloured head came up, and his eyes were looking into hers. But neither in admiration nor displeasure; merely in wonderment.

"Well?" cried Josian, infinitely amused at his expression, and not insensible to the depth and colour of his eyes.

" Are you wanting me to do anything for you, miss ? "

" Yes ; I want you to tell me about yourself. You're such a puzzle, you know. Who are you, Demetrius, and were you always a servant ? "

As she asked her questions she moved her position, and seated herself at the other end of the bench, facing him across the wash-tub, over which he had bent again, though now his fingers were idle.

" That's of no account," he muttered, " since I am one now."

" But you weren't always ? " she persisted.

" Perhaps not. What can it matter ? " he answered at length.

For a single moment Josian Trehane considered the point. Did it or did it not matter that, despite his present menial capacity, this good-looking servant of her crabbed old relative was gentle-mannered, well-spoken, and obviously out of his natural position ? The question began to worry her, so she thrust it aside, as she did all the other unpleasantnesses of life.

Apparently Demetrius had expected no reply to his mournful query, for he had turned away from his companion, and was gazing abstractedly into the green heart of the Abbey grounds.

" What are you thinking about ? " cried the girl.

" I was wondering whether I might ask you something," Demetrius said slowly, but without changing his position.

" Oh, yes ; you may certainly ask."

" It is this : what sort of a man do I seem to you ? "

" Good Lord ! " Josian cried, surprised into freedom of speech by the unexpected nature of his question. " And what in the world do you mean ? "

" Do I seem to be a—a bad sort of fellow ; do I seem cruel, vindictive, jealous, covetous ? The kind of man who would—who might—yield to an impulse, if provoked. . . ."

His voice trailed off into silence, while Josian sat staring at him. It was a reflex of the question which was racking him night and day—the natural sequel to his morbid and rigorous attempts at self-analysis—the desperate query which it was impossible to ask of Robert Crumpler, and which he shrank from addressing to either Mrs. Summerhayes or Barjona Furmedge. To ask it of one who did not possess their inner knowledge of his unusual history had seemed a comparatively easy as well as a more satisfactory mode of procedure, until he made the attempt and broke down midway.

But whatever the question meant to the unhappy inquirer, it was so far removed from anything that Josian Trehane had expected it to develop into that she grew peevish and mocking in her disappointment. She made an unladylike demonstration sufficiently loud to draw his eyes once more to her face. She spoke with raised hand to her yawning mouth.

"What a very odd question, to be sure," she said. "Why, you seem to me just Mr. Crumpler's servant, nothing more. Servants never have any character save what they get from their masters. And then 'tis merely to say whether they're trustworthy or not—that's all."

"But a servant, even the humblest, is also a man!" Demetrius protested with a kind of subdued passion that drew the girl's attention, like an unsuspected flame on a blackened hearth.

"Is he?" she asked, assuming a nonchalance which she did not feel. "But such a poor sort of creature is hardly worth considering, so you can't be surprised that I've not thought of you at all, save as a person who cooks the food—and washes the clothes! But if you really want my opinion of you, Demetrius, I hope I shan't hurt your feelings when I say that I think you're the stupidest and most uninteresting young man I ever met."

If his concern had been less desperate, he might have discovered her slip, and have fixed her with her own implied concession that he possessed a sensibility capable of being wounded by her frank declaration. But Demetrius, if he perceived the admission or suspected the insincerity of her speech, made no attempt to charge her with either. He hid his wistfulness by a renewed application to his work, wondering dully how long a man might suffer such a torture of uncertainty and keep his reason whole.

"Was there ever such a handsome, interesting fool?" asked Josian of herself a little malignantly. For his quiet reserve and dignified submission to her whims thwarted her curiosity at every point, and left her with an irritating sense of inferiority. She rose from the bench.

"Clumsy lout!" she exclaimed. "You're splashing me."

He apologized, but did not desist from his occupation.

"You're very anxious to get that work done!"

"I have other things to see to."

"Well, I want some flowers. Come and cut them for me."

"Mr. Crumpler has forbidden me to pick them."

"But you're the gardener, aren't you?"

" Yes ; I see to them for him. But that's all."

" Nonsense ! " said Josian. " Do you refuse to oblige me ? "

" I can't disobey my master."

" Oh, your—upon my word ! Did not Mr. Crumpler order you to serve me ? "

" Yes. But not against his wishes."

" I shall tell him how impertinent you are ! " cried the young lady.

All the flowers of the Orient would have been as nothing to her at this moment compared with one rosebud put into her hand by the contumacious Demetrius. The situation exasperated her, in spite of the poetic echo jingling at the back of her mind.

" You will tell him, I suppose, what you please," the young man said in an unchanged voice.

And Josian kept her word, complaining to her uncle in no measured terms of his servant's rudeness.

" I'll talk to him," said Crumpler with emphasis.

When the three met again—it was at table—there was an undisguised glitter of triumph in the girl's eyes, Demetrius seeming more than usually subdued. She only realized her victory when a sudden turn of his head, as he waited on them, gave her a view of a recent contusion on one side of his forehead. Her own crimsoned as their eyes met, and after her uncle had left the room she caught Demetrius by the sleeve as he was following.

" Mr. Crumpler has struck you," she said.

There was no response to that.

" Does he often do so ? "

" He has not done it before."

" Was it on my account ? "

Again he was silent. Josian grew ashamed. Her hand was still resting on his arm. She raised it now and gently touched the bruise.

" I'm sorry," she said softly. Then, " Poor Demetrius ! "

Her hand fell. Demetrius went away without a word, but in that moment, with her touch, something within him had been quickened into life—some deadened sensibility, some dormant perceptiveness—and from henceforth, as he himself recognized in a vague and troubled way, the girl would have to be reckoned with. She had, by that one act of involuntary tenderness, assumed a personality which her girlish malice and elfish provocative ways would never have won for her.

But the effect was to turn the young man's thoughts still more inward upon himself.

As to Josian, if she did not forget the incident after making her apology, or allow its lesson to be lost upon her, that was the most that might have been said for her. She resolved to play fairly ; but play she must, and even allowed herself a little extra licence because of her generosity in accepting Demetrius's rebuffs without the obvious retaliation.

Towards him she was sometimes imperious, sometimes merely saucy, but she always contrived to maintain the superiority of her position, augmenting it wilfully at such times when his customary dejection induced in him a submissiveness that irritated her for no reason which she could have named. On these occasions, to see him wince or burn beneath a carefully barbed gibe sent her away elated for the moment to become properly repentant ten minutes afterwards, and only deterred from apology by the reflection that so humble-minded a young man had probably regretted his resentment as much as she did her dainty insolence.

The tragi-comedy might have lasted for several weeks longer, being enacted between the desultory sittings which Crumpler claimed of the girl, and her own inadequate attempts to discover the whereabouts of the missing paper. But the unexpected arrival one morning of Barjona Furmedge with a letter for the sculptor gave a sudden and alarming stimulus to Josian's activity, and suggested a little more purpose in her relations with the handsome young servant.

Letters were rare at the Tower of the Winds. The few that found their way into Crumpler's hand were for the most part local commissions and stonemasons' bills. The very handwriting on this one did not strike a note of familiarity until he had glared at it for several seconds.

He then tore it open with his long flexible fingers and read it quickly. When he folded it up there was a look on his face which Josian, who was sitting to him at the time, had never seen on those strongly marked lineaments before. Without addressing her, he stalked to the studio door, and bawled into the open air for Demetrius.

The young fellow appeared after a short delay, during which Josian, posing as Flora, with her abundant hair flowing round her bare throat and draped bosom, had time to reflect that he had never yet intruded into the studio at such a moment, and

that she must be worth a young man's eyes since an old one took the trouble to model her. Her neck was aching, for the sitting had been unusually long, but she forbore to relax the delicately arch poise of her head, and kept her eyes side-wise on the door.

" Come here," said Crumpler. Demetrius stepped into the studio. " My son's coming," said the old man, whose inexplicable affection for his unresponsive relative led him to claim a closer kinship than was warranted by the fact. " He'll be here the day after to-morrow. You're to get ready for him."

Josian's head declined from its statuesque attitude. Her expression became frankly curious. Was this an unexpected development, or had her father, anticipating it, purposely left her in ignorance ? Crumpler went on speaking :

" My son's a fine Lunnon gentleman," he said, " used to genteel ways, and he's to have things as he likes 'em while he's here. Or maybe he'll turn tail like the Prince did when he found the old King's state not to his taste, and ran back to town."

" I'm afraid, sir," Demetrius answered respectfully, " that I don't understand fine London ways."

" He he, that's odd too ! You came from the town, didn't 'ee ? "

The look of distress that always accompanied any reference to his past history, or any attempt of his own to unfathom it, struck heavy lines across Demetrius's mouth and brow. With a slight gesture of despair he gave his old answer :

" I don't remember."

Then, on the instant, he became aware of Josian Trehane's amazed eyes. Until that moment he had not realized her presence, for her position by reason of an arrangement of screens was less conspicuous from the doorway than the girl had imagined, and as usual he had kept his eyes mostly on the ground.

" Well, 'tis neither here nor there," Crumpler was saying, while all the blood in the other's body seemed concentrated in the half-healed bruise on his forehead. " You'm to look sprack, and have things ready for him. My son's a grand gentleman, and is to be treated as such. Have 'ee got that into your disremembering noddle, eh ? "

" I'll assuredly do my best to please the gentleman, sir," said Demetrius, forcing himself back to the point, for all the air about him seemed filled with a multiplication of grey eyes,

wondering and beautiful—with a beauty which he had accepted unconsciously until this moment. "But there are things we'll want," he added after a moment. "A gentleman from London will hardly be satisfied with your plain way of living, I'm afraid, sir."

"Huh!" cried the old man, displeased as the observation reflected on himself, and approving as it implied taste and judgment on the part of the expected visitor. "What does a thick skull like you know about it if you've forgotten your life in Lunnon?"

Demetrius was silent, wondering also. These stray flashes from out a darkened memory, perceptive, instinctive, intuitive—however they best might be described—were not the least disturbing factor in his present mental condition. They indicated, or he fancied so, a faintly stirring activity within those deadened cells, and whether such possible recuperation was a thing most to be desired or feared Demetrius shrank from determining.

Meanwhile, Crumpler was considering.

"There's sense in what you say," he went on presently. "We'll be too countrified for my son. I'll give you a list to hand to Furmedge when he calls to-morrow."

"That's leaving it rather late, isn't it, sir?" asked Demetrius, glad of any reason for dragging his thoughts away from himself. "Couldn't I take your list down to the village to-day?"

"No!" the old man snapped in quick reply. "You don't quit these grounds unless I tell you to. You'll bide here, and get the place ready for a gentleman's accommodation."

"Very well, sir."

"And mind this: my son's used to good service. See that you obey him in everything. You're to take his orders as from me."

"But," Demetrius said, honestly resolved to get the position more clearly defined this time, "supposing your son's wishes go against your own?"

"Why then," said Crumpler with a grin, "'twill be for you to find out which of us can kick the hardest. Now go along and get to work."

The young man went away and the old man returned to his modelling. Always a taciturn worker, he was now unusually silent as his lean, dexterous fingers moulded the plastic clay into shape, adding here, shaving away there, producing a strong curve with one subtle sweep of his thumb, correcting where

nature had erred, and gradually bringing the whole into a glorified representation of his faulty model.

The work went on for half an hour. Then, happening to glance across at the girl, the sculptor, with an artist's quick perception, became aware that she was not posing satisfactorily. Her position was unchanged, but her expression had fallen from its former naive archness. The bright lips drooped, the laughing eyes had lost their vivacity. Crumpler suspended his clay-covered hands in mid-air, looking sourly at her.

" I'm tired," said Josian, rising and stepping down from the throne. " I can't sit any longer."

The old man grunted, and continued to work for a few minutes in silence. Josian came and stood near, apparently to compare the bust with her own face as she knew it—in reality to mark the progress.

" Why," she cried involuntarily, " you've nearly finished it, haven't you ? "

To her untutored eyes there seemed little left to be done. With the completion of the bust there would be, from her uncle's point of view, no reason for her continuance at the Tower. The thought filled her with remorseful dismay.

" Not yet," Crumpler muttered. " There's the hair needs a deal of working on. And the mouth don't satisfy me yet."

" Oh," said Josian faintly, " then you haven't done with me yet ? "

The old man peered at her beneath his bushy eyebrows.

" Growing tired of it, niece, eh ? " He chuckled inside his dry old lips. " Well, 'twas a hard bargain your father drove, but you'm free to go whenever you please."

" My father's bargains are his own affair," Josian retorted with admirable self-possession. " But I will stay, if you wish it, until you have quite finished with me."

" I'll tell you when I've done with 'ee," said Crumpler without turning his head.

Josian left the studio in an irritated mood. She blamed herself for her hitherto signal failure as a conspirator ; she blamed Demetrius for having drawn her attention away from the primary object of her visit ; she blamed young Drenchard for his inopportune arrival—if, in truth, it was not arranged malice prepense ; in which case, she blamed her father very heartily for not having prepared her for this possible danger.

She had a day and a half in which to arrange her plans.

At the end of an hour she had made some important decisions.

She would plead indisposition when next her uncle should require her in the studio. This would delay the completion of the bust.

She would waste less time with Demetrius. That would keep her mind more closely fixed on the object in view.

She would write immediately to her father, reporting this latest development and asking his advice.

She would twist young Drenchard round her finger as soon as they met.

Then Josian Trehane slipped down from the broken fragment of wall where all these wise precautions had been decided upon, and caught sight of her uncle's servant crossing the garth towards the cowshed, a milking pail in his hand. The afternoon sunshine made his patch of white hair glisten like snow. His head was bent lower than usual, and Josian knew that he had seen her.

Then she sped after him as light-heartedly as if no good resolutions had been made at all.

The next half-hour was extremely interesting to the girl, but full of torment to the man who had shivered and glowed beneath the touch of her light fingers on his wounded forehead.

XIV

THE ENCOUNTER

IF Lawrence Jermyn had never before exemplified any proverbial virtue he should have put his detractors to the blush at this point of his unstable career. For, during the time occupied in conveying himself and Silas Drenchard from London to Dorset, he manifested towards his companion that extreme form of friendship which is picturesquely described as sticking closer than a brother.

The farther the metropolis was left behind and the nearer the Eclipse rolled its passengers to the heart of the fair western county, the more morose and silent did Silas Drenchard become, and the more despairing of ridding himself of this undesired comrade. If he had been less self-absorbed, he might have noticed that a change was also taking place in Jermyn himself with every mile of Dorset soil that the coach wheels covered.

It was not until they reached Blandford that either of the two became cognizant of a humour shared in common. It was naturally the sharpest brain that made the observation. The two young men were standing in the roadway before the inn at which they had just dined. Drenchard, under the appraising eyes of his fellow-travellers, was paying for both, when Jermyn suddenly clapped his companion on the shoulder, and demanded the reason of his moody looks.

Drenchard resented a pertinent question which within hearing of the others he could not effectually answer. He made some rambling reply about not being overmuch in love with the country.

"H'm!" Jermyn responded, his momentary lightness dropping from him. "Truth to tell, neither am I. I'd wish to Heaven, Sly, you'd been going anywhere on earth but to this same cursed county!"

"How's that?" Drenchard asked with languid interest. "D'ye mean——"

A dig in the waist brought his question to an abrupt end. He eyed his friend morosely, and Jermyn took up his tale.

"Of all the damp, damned rotten counties," he protested, "Dorset's the dampest, damnedest, and rottenest! No good ever came out of it and never will. I don't believe it produces anything but wurzels and bankrupts, curse it!"

"It's produced my stepfather," said Drenchard malignantly. "And he's a genius of the first water, if you trust his own tongue. But since you feel so about the place, why the devil do you come into it? I didn't ask you, you know."

Jermyn crooked his arm inside the younger man's. He had had several ebullitions of a similar nature while on the road—especially at such times when two companions were likely to become separated in the press.

"My dear fellow," he said, "if you had been travelling straight to hell I'd have come with you."

"You don't need anyone to show you the way," Drenchard commented in an undertone.

"And what you've just told me concerning the old gentleman, your estimable relative—by the way, he is old, I suppose?"

"About eighty," answered the other in a suspicious savage manner. "And good to live to a hundred, apparently."

"Don't say so! He could never be so inconsiderate."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"It grieves me to think of a promising lad like you—yes, I'm fond of you, Sly, deuced fond; haven't met a fellow I like so well for a long time, and now that poor Matravers has kicked the bucket——"

"I wonder you like to talk of him!" said Drenchard with a sly look.

"Oh, pooh!" cried Jermyn airily. He had led his companion a little apart from the rest of the waiting passengers. "I tell you I don't blame myself. If Matravers couldn't get his neck out of the noose, that was his affair. I couldn't have saved him."

"I don't see that. It seems to me——"

"I know! But never mind that now. Hang Matravers!"

"They've done it."

"So they have, Sly! That being so, what the devil are you worrying about? A dead man's no use to anybody."

"I never mentioned the fellow. He's nothing to me. I only saw him once—at the races, in his father's time."

" Let him rot, I say ! We were speaking of your father, not his."

" The old man's no blood of mine," was Drenchard's inverse disclaimer.

" But you're his only kinsman, aren't you ? "

" There's his sister's husband—and daughter."

" Extremely interesting ! Friendly terms ? "

Drenchard laughed unpleasantly.

" They hate each other like poison."

" Infinitely interesting ! The young lady too ? "

" Oh, I don't know anything about her," grumbled Drenchard.

" Pleasant family relations ! To all intents and purposes, then, you are his sole relative ? "

" If you put it so. What are you driving at ? They're bringing the horses out."

" So I see ! . . . I suppose this ancient genius is wealthy, by the way ? "

" He don't live and he don't talk as if he was. That's all I know."

Drenchard spoke with his gaze fixed on the off-leader's right ear. Jermyn gave him a shrewd look.

" I see," he said as they sauntered together back to the coach. " 'Tis just pure affection for your dear mother's husband that's bringing you into this God-forsaken hole ? "

Drenchard scowled. He had got hold of a straw and was chewing it viciously like any stable-boy.

" Exemplary youth ! May such devotion be rewarded ! " cried Jermyn in his airy mocking way.

" Stop that ! " growled the complimented one. " I wish the infernal old sinner would topple off his perch, and give others a chance ! "

" Ah ! " said Jermyn softly. " There is something, then ? "

Drenchard made no answer. He was engaged in trying to get on to the coach in front of his friend, in the shadowy hope that by some fortunate chance Jermyn might be left behind. That adroit adventurer scraped his heels as he followed him up.

The journey was continued in the golden haze of a July afternoon, along dusty roads which ran between ripening cornfields and the rich pasture land for which the county was famous. Here and there the aftermath was being carried, but for the most part the field labourers were few, and only the great soft eyes of the meditative cows watched the coach pass. The banks

beneath the hedgerows were tangled with flowering grasses, from out of which arose an occasional spire of foxglove, ambitious to top the hedge itself, but the flowers of early summer were over, and the whole aspect of the country-side was of the quiescent quality inseparable from the period that lies between the joyousness of one season and the gracious fulfilment of the next. All colours in the rolling landscape were subdued to the golden green of the pastures, the pale yellow of the cornfields, and the soft duns and purples of the arable land.

The spirits of the two young men appeared in harmony with the subdued tones impressed upon their visual perception. Both were silent. Both were gloomy. Drenchard sat hunched forward, scarcely noticing the landmarks which had been familiar to his boyhood. Jermyn leant back in his seat, hardly more alert, his handsome features grown harsh and lowering. When he made a change in his position, it was done with the impatience of a man who seeks to throw off the incubus of some unpleasant thought.

Sixteen more miles of such amiable companionship brought the pair into Dorchester, and landed them at the *King's Arms*. Drenchard, with Jermyn at his elbow, and a man carrying his baggage at his back, made his way inside the inn. The afternoon sun had beaten down upon them with unshaded force, and Drenchard, who seemed more or less at home in the place, was not slow in calling for refreshment. Jermyn immediately followed his example. The younger man scowled, but an altercation before the drawers was out of the question.

"Dorchester again!" said Jermyn, sitting down with his glass at the bow-window and surveying the long empty High Street.

"Yes, Dorchester," retorted the native morosely. "Last town your dear friend Matravers ever saw."

"My dear Sly, pray have some regard for my feelings. The thought of being so near the very spot makes me feel positively churchyardy."

"You seemed callous enough about it just now," remarked Drenchard. "However, it's Dorchester, as you say. What are you going to do now you've got here? I'm going on."

"At once?"

"At once. If you want to go mooning round the gaol, and thinking about——"

"I don't. I didn't come here for that, as you very well know."

" I don't know anything about it. I only know my own plans —and a few other things besides."

" Let's hear your plans," said Jermyn, emptying the bottle.

" I've told you. I'm for Bindon—straight. The old man's expecting me."

Jermyn rose, shot out his arms, sauntered over to the mirror, flicked the dust from his light-coloured riding-coat and re-arranged his neckcloth.

" I believe I'll come with you, Sly," he said.

" I believe you won't ! " Drenchard answered with a scowl.

" Surely you invited me ? "

" I never did anything of the kind, and you know it ! "

" Upon my soul, here's pretty manners ! If your generosity didn't include an invitation, what the devil did you mean ? Bringing me here to strand me on the pavement ! "

" I didn't bring you ; I didn't want you. You came of your own accord, and you can get back the best way you can."

" How far is it to Bindon ? " asked Jermyn.

He said this with such apparent irrelevance that Drenchard was tricked into answering accurately. Upon which, the elder man looked at his boots with a resigned air.

" No doubt they'll weather it," he said. " Order your chaise, my dear Sly. You'll find me on the doorstep in the morning."

" Look here," cried his exasperated companion, " if it wasn't for the people of the place, I'd tell you what I think of you ! "

" Go on," said Jermyn. " It can't be worse than what I shall say afterwards of you."

For a moment they faced one another : Jermyn cool, insolent and masterful ; Drenchard sullen and angry, but vacillating. He was the first to speak.

" If what I suspect is true, I could get you into trouble," he muttered.

" Perhaps—in London. I doubt if you could here, where identification would be rather difficult. Come, come, my dear Sly, you're not going to be such a fool as to spoil your holiday for the sake of gratifying a natural stinginess. After all, your step-father will have to bear the cost of my pleasant company, not you."

" It's not that," said Drenchard, reddening under a gibe that went home. " But what if I said I don't find your company quite as pleasant as you think it yourself ? "

"I should call it devilish bad taste, and feel it my duty to improve it."

"Thankye," said Drenchard with a faint sneer, "I can look after my own taste."

"You won't find another friend like me."

"Damme, I should hope not! Your friendship didn't do Matravers much good."

"Ah, that's because he died young! I see they're bringing your chaise round. A roomy one, and my baggage wouldn't incommode you. Still, I'm the last man on earth to intrude where I'm not asked—until to-morrow."

A tap at the door, and the information that the chaise was ready broke up the familiarity of the conversation. Drenchard moved slowly to the door. If he deserted the unwanted Jermyn in the streets of Dorchester, the story of his incivility and meanness, he knew, would be all over the town by the next day. Like most vain and selfish natures, Silas Drenchard valued the good opinion of his neighbours, but deprecated any personal expense in obtaining it. He must be well thought of, cheaply. And in the present instance he saw that the simplest way to preserve his reputation, not only in the district of his birth, but elsewhere, was to submit to Jermyn's society at his step-father's house. Sooner or later, he felt convinced, his self-inflicted companion would present himself at the Tower, if only out of a malicious desire to annoy him. Probably his version of the story would reach Miss Trehane, who might pass it on to her father. And, though the Home Secretary naturally would regard the affair as out of his province, there was a chance of its leaking out, to Drenchard's personal discredit among the subordinate clerks and officials.

"Oh, come, if you want to," he said ungraciously as he passed out of the room.

"Charmed, my dear fellow," Jermyn answered. And he followed with the townbred walk which Drenchard had never been able to acquire.

During the drive neither of the two men spoke much. The native was too sullen and displeased to be in a talkative humour; and once again a gloomy depression descended heavily upon the more volatile spirits of his companion. Jermyn's face had, in truth, become almost as lowering as the other's by the time that the chaise was threading the long green lane that led to the Abbey. But, whereas Drenchard was reflecting moodily upon

the prospect immediately ahead, Lawrence Jermyn of the many names was thinking with some bitterness of the still living past.

The heavy wooden doors of the Abbey gatehouse stood wide open, and in the forefront of the cool green vista with its multitudinous lights and shades stood the lean figure of the sculptor waving a welcome. At the sight Jermyn roused himself.

" Is that the genius—I mean local genius—that skinny old scarecrow ? " he asked, while smoothing the brooding lines from his face and composing it to its ordinary silky expression.

Before Drenchard could reply another figure, tall and slender and white-gowned, glided into view, appearing in perspective over the old man's shoulder. Jermyn gave a low whistle.

" Hulloa ! " he exclaimed. " Who's the petticoat ? "

" Hold your tongue ! " growled the other, whose eyes were also riveted on the stranger. " That's my cousin."

" Good Lord ! I never knew you had a cousin, or any relative save that old bag of bones yonder. Doocid fine girl too ! "

" You'd better be civil," warned his friend in surly tones, as he stepped down from the chaise. " I doubt if she's your sort."

" H'm ! not so sure about that," said Jermyn, never taking his eyes off the advancing Josian. " Who is she ? You might tell me that, Sly."

" Daughter of Sir John Trehane," Drenchard answered in a low voice, for the first time pleased at his connection with the great man.

" Good Lord ! The Home Secretary ? "

" My uncle ; yes."

" Ah ! " Jermyn said no more, but became very thoughtful.

There was, in truth, little chance of further private talk, for Crumpler came hurrying out as the feet of the young men touched the ground. He caught his stepson's hand in a bony grip.

" Glad to see 'ee, Silas, glad to see 'ee, my boy ! " he cried with the faint touch of the vernacular into which excitement always drove him. " Ah, a well-grown lad ; ye've put on bulk since I saw ye last. Fine an' hearty ye look too. Ben't 'ee glad to be home again ? "

Then, in the midst of his welcome, he caught sight of Jermyn, who was taking the opportunity of a further stare at the girl in the background.

" Hello, brought your servant with you, my boy ? " the old

man cried, displeasure in his face. " You shouldn't ha' done that. I can't abide strangers."

" Sir ! "

The indignant protest came from Jermyn himself.

" Eh ? " from the old man.

" He's a—a friend of mine," Drenchard explained, almost choking on the word.

" Friend ? What d'ye say ? What's he doing here ? "

Jermyn bowed ; with an eye to the watching girl.

" Permit me to make my apologies," he said, " for what must at first sight look very like an intrusion." Drenchard coughed. " The fact is, sir, the town's devilish hot and dusty at this season, and I was pining for a whiff of real country air, such as blows in your charming Dorset, and my dear friend here—anything wrong, Sly ?—asked me to do him the favour—those were your words, weren't they, Sly ?—to accompany him to his home for a few weeks. I accepted with pleasure ; all the more so as he repeatedly assured me of the welcome which that most generous of men, his stepfather—his own words again, sir—would be certain to accord me."

" Oh," said Crumpler, looking, to Silas Drenchard's disgust, somewhat mollified by the visitor's statement, " friend of yours, eh ? Why didn't you say so at first ? I'm not partial to strangers, servants in particular. They're apt to get talking, and to put queer notions into one another's head. But if he's a friend of yours——"

" Don't put yourself out because of that, sir," Drenchard struck in with remarkable submission. " Mr. Jermyn, I'm sure, is the last man in the world to wish to inconvenience—anyone."

" No ; you can bring him in," conceded the sculptor, turning towards the gateway. " Maybe you'll miss your friend ; maybe you'll find my home dull without him. I've small pleasures for a lad of your age, I know."

Jermyn bowed behind the old man's back.

" Thanks, my boy ; much obliged to you," he muttered ironically.

Drenchard swore beneath his breath. But for the cool-eyed young woman who had seen and heard everything he might have made a further attempt to shake off the undesired presence. As it was, he was disinclined to risk showing himself in a bad light before he had been even introduced to her.

Thus, for good or ill, Lawrence Jermyn entered the gateway

of Bindon Abbey some six weeks after the unconscious body of Demetrius Matravers had been borne across the same stones.

Drenchard stayed behind to confer with the boy who had driven them from Dorchester. As on the occasion of his niece's arrival Crumpler raised his voice in protest when he saw the lad shouldering the first box.

"Let 'em be, let 'em be!" he shrieked. "No stranger can come in!"

"Then how the devil are the things to be got inside?" demanded his stepson angrily.

"My servant'll fetch 'em along for 'ee."

"Servant! You haven't got any servant."

"Yes, I have! Pay him his fee, Silas, and pack him off, or we shall quarrel."

Drenchard sullenly obeyed. Jermyn, he noticed, was already sauntering towards the house with Josian. When the chaise had driven off the young man turned to his stepfather angrily.

"What's this story about your having got a servant?" he demanded. "Devil take your silly prejudices! D'ye expect me to carry the things in? Think I look strong enough for such work?"

"Ah, you don't believe me! Wait a bit. I'll hunt up the lazy scoundrel. He'll do anything you ask; if he don't, kick him."

"Oh, I'll kick him," Drenchard responded, still in a grumbling tone. "But what the devil do you mean by starting such a luxury at your time of life? You're always swearing you hate strangers."

"He's not an ordinary sort of fellow. He's to be trusted."

"I'm sure I hope so," Drenchard muttered, thinking of his stepfather's supposed treasures.

"He's useful to me," Crumpler continued. "He only stands me in his keep. I know better than to pay him wages, he he! And he's got the most perfect torso——"

"Hang his torso—whatever that is! Send the fellow here, and let's see how much his arms and shoulders are worth. Make haste. I want to get indoors."

Crumpler crossed the greensward to the back of the Tower. Drenchard remained keeping guard over his belongings, for it was in the suspicious nature of the man to anticipate the possibility of being cheated in almost any circumstances. Josian and Jermyn were still strolling towards the house.

Crumpler came out, followed by Demetrius, listening in moody silence to the harangue delivered against his sloth and deliberate neglect of a duty which he had been specially directed to leave to his master on this occasion.

At a certain point their path struck at right angles across that of Josian Trehane and her companion. As the four met, Demetrius raised his eyes to ascertain, if possible, whether any of Crumpler's harsh invective had reached the young lady's ears. His glance, having taken notice of her indifferent face, swept lightly over that of the man at her side. He looked at the insolently handsome features and well-cut clothes with a faint interest and went on.

At the very moment when Demetrius lowered his eyes, Jermyn turned his on the passing figure. Instantly he checked alike his leisurely walk and his inconsequent remarks. He remained at gaze, his lips apart, his face turned to a curious leaden hue, his eyes full of incredulous amazement. Then he spoke.

" Good God ! " he said.

XV

TWO CONFER

HIS fair companion was quick to notice these signs of distress, the involuntary expression of which did more to engage her interest than his most attractive endeavours could have done. Demetrius, whom she had scarcely heeded, went out of her mind in an instant.

"What is the matter? Are you ill?" she asked.

Jermyn speedily recovered himself; he was still pale, but his manner was composed. He forced a smile.

"I hope I did not frighten you," he said.

"But what was it?"

"A spasm of the heart," he made answer glibly. "I am subject to such, but it has passed now. Pray don't be alarmed."

"Shall I call my uncle?"

"No, no, not for worlds. A rest and a drink of water will soon put me to rights. Perhaps we had better go indoors without waiting for the others."

"You look very pale," said Josian. "Yes, come inside, and I'll get you the water before Demetrius comes back. Ah, you are not as well as you pretend to be! Are you in pain again?"

"No, no. Very weary all of a sudden; that's all. It must have been the long ride in the sun all day. We were outside passengers."

Josian took him into the house, leading him to the large untidy room which was sitting-and dining-room in one. Jermyn, as he dropped into the most comfortable arm-chair, looked startlingly out of place among the old-fashioned litter of the sculptor's home.

He lay back watching Josian from beneath lowered lids. A taking girl—very. For the moment, he was occupied in wondering what salary fell to the portion of a Home Secretary. Then the sympathetic grey eyes and bright lips drew near to him again. She was holding out a glass of water.

Very little of that austere beverage sufficed for the sufferer. Within a minute or so he declared himself to be almost recovered, though still desirous of rest and quiet.

" If," he begged with a captivating air of deprecation, " you would be so kind as to carry a message privately to your cousin, I should be still further indebted to you."

" My cousin ? Well, I've not spoken to him yet. But, yes, I'll take your message, Mr. Jermyn. What shall I say ? "

" That I must see him at once." Jermyn spoke emphatically —a little hardness perceptible in the hitherto silky tones. " And alone. Please make that plain. I can't stand a crowd about me when I'm like this."

Josian hastened away, whereupon the invalid sprang to his feet and walked to the window, where he peered out cautiously from behind the curtains. But the window did not show him anything save a distant view of crumbling masonry and wooded landscape irradiated by long shafts of golden sunlight. He swore viciously and returned to his seat.

A few minutes later Drenchard came in. Angry looks met angry looks as the two stared at one another.

" Shut the door," said Jermyn curtly.

Drenchard obeyed, and stood with his back against it, frowning a little.

" What's to do now ? " he asked. " Miss Trehane said you were ill. You don't look it."

" Well, I ought to. I've seen a sight to turn the stomach of any man alive."

" Oh ! . . . what might that be ? "

" Lock the door and sit down, and I'll tell you. You can keep the key, man ! Lord, how cautious you are ! "

" Well, any man would think there was something queer about your conduct, you know," grumbled Drenchard, reddening a little, but pocketing the key all the same. " What's happened ? What did you see ? "

" A dead man walking above ground."

Drenchard broke into derisive laughter.

" That all ? "

" Keep quiet, Sly, and listen ! Did you see him ? "

" Who the devil do you mean ? "

" With your stepfather ! "

" He ? "

" Yes."

"Well, what of him? I didn't notice him particularly. I was keeping an eye on my property."

"Didn't you recognize him?"

"No. Did you?"

"At once."

"Who is he, then? Seems to have knocked you silly, anyway."

Jermyn lowered his voice to a whisper.

"It's Matravers!" he said.

Drenchard frowned, looking across at his friend.

"That's impossible," he said. "If I hadn't been with you all day I should say you were drunk. Matravers is dead."

"He ought to be. But he's not—he's here!"

"Fiddlesticks! You're crazy; been thinking about him so much that you're good to fancy any fellow looks like him."

"No. There's no mistake. 'Tis himself. Matravers hadn't a face to forget. You say you didn't recognize him?"

"I tell you I only saw Matravers once; down here—never in London. As to this fellow, I didn't look at his face."

"Well, do at the next opportunity, and then tell me if 'tis not the same man."

"You're devilish unreasonable, you know," Drenchard protested. "Matravers was hanged weeks ago—that is, Jordan was, and you said he was Jordan."

"I said Jordan was Matravers."

"Perhaps it was another Jordan—a real Jordan—that they hanged."

"It wasn't another Jordan they arrested and tried."

"Sure of that?"

"Positive. I tell you I read the trial. The girl's evidence was true as far as it went. . . . Lord, what a whirl my head's in! You didn't have anything to do with it, did you? By God, if I thought that——"

Drenchard sprang up, red and pale by turns in the face of his companion's sudden ferocity. He clutched the key of the room convulsively.

"I?" he stammered. "I? Of course not! How could I know the fellow was here? Besides, you came of your own accord—I didn't ask you and I didn't want you. You know that."

"H'm! I suppose I do, for you're not a good actor, Sly.

Still, whether or no, a nice mess you've got me into in this beggarly hole of yours."

"Well," said the other ungraciously, "you'd better get out of it."

"I want to get out of the mess, but not out of the hole. What the devil am I to do? If I only knew how the fellow came to be here——"

He fell into momentary silence, frowning heavily. Drenchard spoke:

"I believe you've taken fright at nothing. We know that Matravers was hanged, so he can't in reason be alive. Perhaps it's a brother."

"Chut! Sir Lucius only had the one son."

"I forgot that. Well, it must be a chance resemblance."

"No, it's not. 'Tis the very lad himself, for there's another thing I've not told you yet. This fellow has the same name—your cousin called him by it."

"There's nothing in that. Lots of men have the same name."

"Not this name. Did you ever hear Matravers?"

"If so, I've forgotten. I've no head for names. What was it?"

"Demetrius. Not a very common one, you'll grant."

Drenchard looked thoughtful.

"I remember now," he said. "That was the name of the man they hanged. Demetrius Jordan. He kept the first name, then, after he changed the surname."

"Yes. . . . Now, Sly, I don't ask for your advice, because I don't think much of it. But I want your help."

"Why? If I were you, I'd cut it at once."

"Probably," said Jermyn dryly. "I shan't, unless I'm obliged. Now, look here. You've got to find out how the fellow got here, and what he's doing. Those two things."

"I can tell you one at once. He's my stepfather's servant."

"What? Sir Lucius's son a servant?"

Drenchard nodded.

"Always supposing he is Sir Lucius's son."

"Upon my soul, you amaze me! Yet, wait a minute! . . . Yes; that fits in with a notion of mine. He must have escaped from gaol somehow, and is hiding here, afraid to show his face. In which case, I needn't alter my plans, for I could injure him far more than he could injure me."

"You're talking damned nonsense," Drenchard struck in

impatiently. "How could he have escaped? Didn't I read the account of the execution? There were some unusual circumstances, I remember."

"Well, Sly, 'tis a most perplexing business all round. But one thing I stick to. Your stepfather's servant is Demetrius Matravers in the flesh. And, if he chooses, or rather, dares to open his mouth, there's no doubt he might make things devilish awkward for me. Not as bad as I could probably make them for him, but bad enough."

"Well," said Drenchard, after a short pause, speaking with unfriendly satisfaction, "you may be sure of one thing. If Matravers can help himself by injuring you, he will. He's got nothing to love you for, after the way you served him."

Jermyn's face darkened evilly.

"Damn it!" he cried. "Who'd take the word of a skulking convict against that of a free man and a gentleman?"

"No one, of course. But he might set the ball rolling. There's the question of identification, you see."

"I've lain low; I've changed my name."

"You can't change your face. I knew you again."

"Curse you!" cried Jermyn with blazing eyes. "Do you mean——"

"Don't be a fool," said Drenchard, paling and shrinking back against the door. "If I'd meant to do that, shouldn't I have done it at once—directly I saw how the land lay? What do I care for Matravers that I should stir a finger to help him, with no profit for my pains? What does anyone care for a man who's been pronounced guilty and put out of the way? They can hang him again for me! The clumsy scoundrel dropped my new valise and might have split the side!"

"Very well, Sly, I'll accept your declaration of friendship—with the right to keep my eye on you in future. But there's still the other thing that I spoke of just now for you to do. You must find out his recent history. It ought to be easy. If your cousin doesn't know, your stepfather must."

"That's all very well," objected Drenchard. "But what are you going to do in the meanwhile? There'll be fireworks when Matravers sees you again. I think you'd be wise to——"

Jermyn smiled acidly.

"My dear Sly, with your usual acumen you've put your finger on a very important point. Matravers has seen me. We passed within a few yards of each other."

" Ha ! What did he do ? "

" Nothing. Ab-so-lute-ly nothing."

" Didn't recognize you, you mean ? "

" That I can't say. Certainly he made no sign."

Drenchard whistled.

" Odd, wasn't it ? " he said. " On the whole, he'd more to be upset over than you."

" Perhaps his recent experiences have taught him to control his emotions," Jermyn answered with a sardonic smile. " But I'm more inclined to suspect 'twas because he's got something up his sleeve."

" He must have made his mind up remarkably quickly, then," said Drenchard, showing unexpected shrewdness, " for he couldn't have known he was going to meet you at that precise moment."

" Well," cried the other with an oath, " I give it up. But, there's one thing certain, I don't stir from here until I know what Matravers's game is. And that's what you've got to help me to find out."

Drenchard heard him with a look of disappointment.

" What ? You mean to risk staying here ? " he asked.

" Certainly I do. After all, he's as much to lose as I have—more, I ought to say. And, damn it, Sly, I'm no coward."

Which, up to a certain point, was the truth.

" I don't see," protested the other as, at a gesture from Jermyn, he unlocked the door, " that it's any of my business."

" You've made it so. I'm your guest, Sly."

" Pretty sort of a guest," Drenchard grumbled, and listened under protest while his stronger-willed friend forced certain immediate directions upon him.

When Josian came back, some five minutes later, the interesting visitor was not to be seen. An inquiry on her part elicited the information that he had retired to rest in the apartment which had been arranged for Drenchard himself, where he would remain until a room was got ready for him.

" I'll tell Demetrius to see to it at once," said Josian, who had by this time assumed some little authority in the ill-ordered house.

Drenchard watched her moving light-footed down the passage. Then, with a gloomy frown, he went in search of his stepfather.

XVI

THE COMING STORM

IN a couple of days the stir caused in the quiet household by the advent of the latest visitors had calmed down, and Robert Crumpler, at least, had drifted back into his old routine, dragging Demetrius with him.

By that time his pitiful history was known to the man most concerned by his own showing in making himself master of the facts. The sculptor, duly questioned by his stepson, had no reason for refusing to account for his servant's presence to one who could not be suspected of a future attempt to deprive him of such service through the medium of the law. The only stipulation which he made was that no chance word from Drenchard should enlighten Sir John Trehane as to the facts—a consideration which had laid an embargo of silence on Crumpler's tongue where Trehane's daughter was concerned. Drenchard promised lightly, thinking it extremely probable that Jermyn would require him at once to lodge an information with his chief.

To his surprise, such a proceeding appeared to have no part in his friend's formulation and plans. Having verbally chased Drenchard up side alleys, waited to trip him up in dark corners, and rounded him off from obvious ways of escape, Jermyn apparently accepted his extraordinary statements as truth, and ventured to re-emerge in the light of society.

Here his natural cool insolence came in strongly to his aid. To a more finely tempered man the situation would have held pitfalls, and his demeanour, particularly when in the presence of his old acquaintance, must have inevitably aroused wonder, deepening into suspicion, even in that darkened mind. But the gentleman of adventure carried off the difficult position with an airy inconsequence which masked a genuine firmness.

He treated his host's servant as a servant, seeming at first scarcely to notice his presence, and accepting such small personal

services as Demetrius rendered with the indifference naturally due from a superior to a menial. In secret, he observed him closely, but Demetrius's usual air of introspective brooding made the act one which might have been safely carried out with far less caution than the wary Jermyn employed.

After an interval of such covert observance he made an advance, and by degrees put certain casual questions to the young man in such a way that, he flattered himself, the other must be playing an unusually deep game, and possess a self-control not borne out by his attitude in general, not to have fallen into the trap. The most daring of these was put about a week after their first encounter.

"By the way," Jermyn said as Demetrius handed him his hat and cane preparatory to his going out, "what's your other name? I never hear you called anything but Demetrius."

"The master has no other name for me. Here are your gloves, sir."

"Thanks. Yes, that's what I say. Miss Trehane too. It doesn't seem fitting that a young lady should call a handsome fellow like you by your first name."

Demetrius, busy with the set of the other's coat, made no reply. But at Josian's name a little colour had come into his face, and his lips were firmly set.

"You haven't answered my question," said Jermyn, over his shoulder. "Any objection to tell your other name?"

There was no answer—only the flutter of nervous fingers across his back.

"Not ashamed of it, I suppose?"

After a pause, the answer was breathed in his ear—a miserable "Yes" so full of a recognized shame and dread that Jermyn's latest test of his companion's disingenuousness precluded the need of any more. No man who was acting a part, no man who knew the relations that existed between himself and his questioner, could have spoken so.

Jermyn twisted round to look at him. His mind was now at ease; he could afford to smile. He did so, acidly. The moment when the admission was wrung from Demetrius Matravers, Jermyn put his foot on his neck, and he meant to keep it there.

"Oho," he said with biting suavity, "like that, is it? I begin to understand your position here, my friend. You make me curious. Perhaps I shall find out—things."

They were looking one another in the face now, and Demetrius faced his tormentor with a kind of desperate courage.

"Perhaps you will; perhaps you will not," he said.

Of his master he felt tolerably certain. Both as servant and as model he was, as he knew, too useful to Crumpler to be sacrificed to a stranger's curiosity.

Jermyn laughed lightly; the game had begun. He cocked his hat at a rakish angle and walked into the open air. Fine and sweet it was on this warm August morning, and the grounds immediately surrounding the Tower showed signs of the additional cultivation it had received from Demetrius's hands. Overgrown borders and beds, littered with last year's leaves and rearing, flowers of sparse bloom and sickly stalks, had been changed into a growth of trim and healthy plants. The lumpy gravel path that partially surrounded the house was now free of weeds and in process of levelling. It was evident that a painstaking toil had been bestowed upon this outdoor service. In truth, it was only in such work that Demetrius took the smallest interest and was able for a brief while to remit the severe and painful self-analysis which had now become a daily habit.

Jermyn made no attempt to hide his natural distaste for all things rural. He passed the rose-bushes and trained honeysuckles for the most part with unseeing eyes; if he glanced at them at all it was merely to aim a nicely calculated blow with his cane which switched off one of the late lingering blooms. Demetrius, watching, felt a twinge of pity for the decapitated flower which indicated a further development of his finer susceptibilities.

A harsh voice broke the silence. Crumpler stood at his elbow.

"I want you in the studio this morning," he said. "Miss Trehane won't sit to-day; says she's promised to drive with Mr. Jermyn. She's welcome. I'm in no hurry to get the bust finished, though I reckon her father is, rot him! And this evening you shall go down to the village for the candle-ends."

"Candle-ends, sir?"

"I said candle-ends, didn't I? I shall need 'em when I cast the bust. Podger collects 'em for me and puts 'em by till I send to fetch 'em. But that will be later. The gentry folk are going to drive down to Lulworth, and won't be back before evening. We can get a good day's work done before then."

Demetrius heard his orders with mingled feelings. Un-

realized by himself, in spite of all his introspection, his appreciation of the trivial occurrences of his present life was slowly reawakening.

Josian Trehane's revivifying touch was the primary cause of this, and now the antipathetic presence of Jermyn, whom he instinctively disliked, opened his heart still more to everyday influences. Personalities instead of shadows began to press upon him, although his own personality remained a gloomy and overmastering mystery still.

Since his journey into the village to question the tranter he had not been permitted to leave the place. The prospect of an evening walk had, therefore, a certain attractiveness about it. But in front of it lay the arduousness of a task from which he shrank. Robbed by circumstances of his St. Stephen, the sculptor's vivid imagination had seen in the intended model the possibilities of a Prometheus—a Prometheus young and differing from the conventional type in that he was to be slim and graceful, but who should bear upon his agonized face the stamp of deep and overwhelming suffering. In Crumpler's art realism predominated, he, in truth, having a scornful contempt for the milder idealism, which he stamped as sheer sentimentality, of other sculptors. It was largely owing to this quality of rugged, almost brutal strength, which characterized all his work that his genius had failed to win the recognition which he merited. He was better fitted, as one of his critics had observed, to produce devils than angels. Only in his less important work—the wax busts and the delicate carvings in ivory by which he was solely remembered after his death—was the play of a lighter hand and a more genial fancy apparent.

What he wrought out of the cold marble he exacted from the living flesh, as Demetrius had discovered. The cords which bound him to his rock—a mass of unwrought Portland stone—were no mere artistic make-believe. The pose itself was irksome in the extreme, and added to his discomfort was the consciousness that his helpless half-stripped body was at the mercy of the modeller's tart humours. Once already he had left the studio with the mark of the old man's stick across the shoulders which had failed to adapt themselves to the desired pose.

Josian came by. The letter to her father had not yet been written. There was still plenty of time as long as the bust remained unfinished, and she had scarcely seen enough of her cousin to justify her in accusing him of collusion. So the days

slipped by very pleasantly and the lives of men hung in the balance.

She paused at her uncle's elbow, and lingered to throw a word to Demetrius after the old man had passed on.

"You look tired," she said gaily. In her blue and white muslin she was like a dainty sportive butterfly. "I hope you haven't much to do to-day. As we're all going out, I suppose you'll get a holiday?"

"Mr. Crumpler wants me in the studio, miss."

"That's restful work," said the girl, thinking of her own easy pose. "I must be going on. The gentlemen are waiting for me. Good day!"

Demetrius watched her crossing to the gatehouse, where Jermyn and Drenchard had already met. He was not too far away to notice the elder man's spruce comeliness of figure as he turned to greet the girl, nor the alacrity with which she accepted his proffered arm. The three went away together, and the one who was left behind suddenly hid his face from the light of the brilliant day with a groan.

Rebellion stirred in his repressed heart. Neglectful of his immediate duties he went to sit by the stream awhile, there to wrestle once more, in weary reiteration, with the old doubts and questions. The clear dark water flowed steadily by, and the pebbly bed of it was more lucidly revealed to his physical gaze than were to his mental penetration the depths and shallows of his own soul. The black horror of which he had spoken to Furmedge in the early days of his distress still remained, blocking his way to the knowledge of the past. Before it, courage was apt to fail, so that, after long periods of brooding, he could scarcely tell whether, could that stone of stumbling have been rolled away, he would still desire to probe behind its mysteries or not.

But to-day, stimulated by Jermyn's gibes, and moved in a way which he did not understand by the easy flitting of Josian Trehane from his side to the arm of the stranger, Demetrius attacked the position more boldly. Chin in hand, he sat staring less at the moving water than at the conical erection beyond it where this second life of his had first come into being. When the appallingness of the primary question weighed too heavily upon him he drew his mind off to lesser points of consideration —to the unknown woman who had blessed him, and whose musky handkerchief lay wrapped around the phial of poison against his

heart ; to the giver of that phial ; to the small green bottle itself, so jealously guarded, and the way of escape which it held. And at length, by no considerable connection, to Josian Trehane—that radiant vision who had flashed in upon the darkness of his night.

He did not trouble to ask himself what comfort she had brought—or if, in truth, her coming had not rather thrust him down a little deeper into the mire which his own feet churned up at every turn. Hitherto, he had thought of her as of a beautiful elusive thing, whom his guilty hands—and all men held him to be guilty—would defile by the lightest finger touch. But to-day, as he lay upon the river-bank with the sun and shadow dappling his brooding face, she became to him less ethereal and seemed to draw nearer to his own earthly plane. No longer an aloof young goddess, but a creature of warmth and moods, who had favours and smiles to bestow—and scorn and hatred as well. He shivered in the hot air as he thought of that, and dreaded, and yet longed for her return.

Crumpler's voice summoned him. Rising, he made haste to take his one treasure from its place inside his coarse shirt, and carried it to the spot where he was in the habit of concealing it when compelled to remove it from his own person. He hid it behind a loose stone in one of the mouldering Abbey walls, and went to fulfil his duty as model to Robert Crumpler.

The day was several degrees older when he was released. Morning had lapsed into early afternoon, and some significant physiographical changes had taken place. The early freshness of the atmosphere had gone ; the air hung still and heavy beneath a coppery sky, and struck upon the young man's body after the chilling inaction of the studio with the heat of an open furnace. He sweated and gasped for breath. A sensation of faintness, aggravated by some vaguely felt nervous dread, sent him staggering against the nearest tree-trunk in physical and mental distress.

The old man, whose fibres were as strong as wires, who could have worked for twelve hours on stretch had the humour taken him, followed Demetrius, grumbling aloud. It was apparent that the diminution of the light, rather than consideration for the aching limbs of his sitter, had induced him to lay down his tools thus early in the day.

" What did you say ? " asked Demetrius, who had scarcely been listening.

"I said there's thunder about," Crumpler answered. "A storm over Dorchester way. Coming hither, too, so quick as God A'mighty can bring it. 'Twill fetch 'em along, I reckon."

"I suppose so, sir."

"What's the matter?" questioned the old man, peering at him. "Not afeared of thunder, are you?"

"I—I hope not, sir."

"Ah! I remember now. They hanged you in a thunderstorm. I reckon the A'mighty's artillery was the last sound you heard."

He threw back his head and laughed. Demetrius left his tree-trunk and moved away.

"Ha, where's thee going? I've got a job for 'ee," Crumpler cried.

"I remember, sir. The candle-ends for the busts." Demetrius took a pitiable pride in such testimonials to the present state of his memory. "But I thought, if the guests are likely to return soon, I'd better attend to the supper."

"So you can. But they'll not be here just yet. And the candle-ends can wait."

"You want me to do something else, sir? Am I not to go to the village, after all?"

"There's no hurry. You must be here for supper. No—the job's to be done here. This way."

He marched off in the direction of the outhouses, and opened the door of the building which was part cowshed and part stables. Demetrius followed dejectedly enough. The prospect of the storm had created a nervous tension, easily understood since Crumpler's dry remark, and underneath was keen disappointment at the loss of the small pleasure which a walk to the village would have afforded.

His master jerked open the door. Inside the light was too dim to reveal more than vague forms of various animals, but the air resounded with the plaintive squalling of puppies—the fractious cries being, in truth, audible at some distance. Crumpler flung back a shutter, and pointed a contemptuous foot at a straw-lined box on the ground. The mother of the puppies watched him with gentle, anxious eyes.

"I want 'em got rid of," he said.

"How?" asked Demetrius blankly.

"How? Drown 'em, of course, blockhead. How else? There's a sack—that'll take the lot, and the weight'll sink it.

You can get through the hedge over there, and drop the sack into the mill-race beyond. 'Twill be too heavy, I reckon, to come back."

Demetrius stood staring stupidly at the little helpless wailing creatures. The mother left her offspring for a moment to nuzzle her nose in his hand.

Crumpler having given his orders, turned to leave the shed. The young man spoke at last.

" Sir," he faltered, " do you really mean it ? "

It was a task beyond him, and he knew it, though lacking at the moment the courage to declare it to be so.

" Of course I mean it," growled the old man.

" But, sir, Miss Trehane——"

" What's she got to do with it ? "

" She's fond of them, and of Daisy too. She visits them every morning."

Crumpler turned back and bent over the box for a few moments, grabbing first one, then another, of the puppies, finally selecting a plump little rascal which he set aside on the ground.

" Daisy can keep that one," he said. " 'Tis the best marked. But the rest must go."

" There's only five, sir."

" Four too many. Drown 'em, and be quick about it."

" Don't ask it of me, sir ! "

" Eh, why not ? "

" I can't do it ! "

" You—can't—do—it ? "

" No, sir. I must disobey you in this."

Crumpler's face underwent a change. Seen in the dusk of the shed it was not a pleasant sight.

" What the devil do ye mean ? "

Demetrius was silent.

" Do you refuse to obey me ? "

" Only in this matter, sir."

Crumpler seized him by the shoulders.

" When I took you into my service," he said, his eyes gleaming fiercely at the shrinking youth, " 'twas on the understanding that you obeyed me in everything. In everything, I say. What else do the letters on your naked flesh mean ? If it hadn't been for that, d'ye think I'd ha' thought twice about marching you back to the prison you came from, and handing you over to

them as had a right to that pretty body o' thine? And what's to hinder me from taking you back now? Turned tender-hearted, have 'ee? 'Tis a fine thing that a fellow who's killed a man must be squeamish when he's asked to drown a pup! Or is it the lady you've got in your mind? He he! That's richer still! What's a crazy-witted, hang-gallus loon like you to do with fair maids and sheep's eyes, and love-making? But you, ye young devil, if that's what's in your half-filled pate, I'd have you know the girl's a prize for a lord, and won't waste her kisses on a warmed-up corpse like you!"

Demetrius, shuddering and pale, wrenched himself away, too forlorn to beg for mercy, too distressed to remember for the moment the occasion which had led to this storm of bitter words. He could only cover his face with his hands and be dumb.

The old man's grim pleasantry ended with a harsh laugh. He turned away once more. From the doorway he issued a last mandate, heavy with vindictiveness.

"And see that you obey me, you young rip," he said, fist in air and wild eyes glittering. "The sack, the pups, the mill-race. Put 'em together, or, by the Lord that made you, you'll regret it before your hair's gone much whiter, my lad!"

He went out, banging the door after him. In the warm dusk of the cowshed, among the only living creatures to whom his secret could never be betrayed, Demetrius went down upon his knees, feeling as dumb and as helpless as they.

The puppies had ceased their cries and were feeding placidly, save the one which had been earmarked for salvation, and was now whimpering feebly outside the box. It was this note of thin misery which first roused the young man. Stretching out a shaking hand he grasped the puppy and lifted it in with the rest.

Presently he rose. Those quiet moments, in spite of the abandonment of his attitude, had not been unfruitful. Resolution now went hand in hand with a desperate courage. A touch of the former spirit of rebellion stirred within him. He would dare to disobey his master.

Of the result of such daring he could foretell little. If found out, the consequences were bound to be unpleasant. But his judgment suggested that Crumpler would hardly go to the extreme length for the sake of a petty spite. Demetrius knew himself to be too useful to the sculptor to be lightly thrown over —more especially when, as he supposed, the betrayal must

bring a certain amount of judicial reprimand upon the man who had connived at a gross miscarriage of justice. No. Robert Crumpler would not, in his wrath, return his disobedient servant to the authorities of Dorchester. And, if he did, what was the life of Demetrius Jordan better than that of a healthy terrier pup? At the worst, there would still remain the little green phial with its promise of dreamless sleep or revivified memory.

Very cautiously he opened the door and stole out. The skies were still more overcast now, the heat more intense. Even the branches around the Tower were silent in their trembling. From the distance came a low dull rumbling. The storm was coming on. Demetrius wiped his damp forehead and breathed hard. Resolution remained firm, but certain nervous activities had been set in motion, and had to be quelled.

Crumpler was not in sight. Demetrius first secured the poison bottle from its hiding-place, and then approached the house. The studio door was closed. He remembered that it had stood open when they had gone to the cowshed. Presumably the sculptor had returned to his work. A few yards farther on he heard the dull sounds caused by the mallet and chisel, and knew that he had nothing to fear from immediate discovery.

He went back to the shed, placed the four puppies in a covered basket, shut in the remaining one with its mother, and moving swiftly across the grass to the gateway left the Abbey grounds and went out into the heart of the coming storm.

XVII

AGAIN, THE WOMAN

IT was only when he was half-way down the long road which led to the village that the possible significance of his action burst upon him, and filled his heart with a wild joy.

He stood still in his tracks, heedless for the moment of the oncoming clouds of darkness and of the heavy oppression that held in abeyance all sound and motion save his own. Stood still, the basket on his arm, his bare head revealing his sign manual of shame to the open day, a curious, ludicrous figure of a young man—to ask himself this question :

Was it possible that one whose whole sentiment revolted at the slaughter of a few puppies could ever have taken the life of a fellow-creature ?

Reason, on the face of it, answered no.

The intoxication of this discovery—for at the moment he believed the evidence to be conclusive—mounted to his brain. He sat down by the roadside, opened his basket, and thrusting gentle hands in among the wriggling little bodies lifted a pair of the warm young things to his breast and face, blessing their existence and the peril past, since by these so great a conviction had come to minister to his own distress.

When he went on again it was with an easier heart than he had carried since Robert Crumpler had crushed his reawakening intelligence with those words of awful import : " You'm a murderer ! " He wondered why he had not understood before ; why the old man's inverse gibe at his squeamishness had not enlightened him. He tried to recall his sensations at the moment, and in so doing found the solution easily enough. The harsh order, his sudden revulsion from it, his ineffectual labouring for a way of escape, acting upon a constitution already debilitated by the strain of the day's posing and the nervous dread induced by the storm, had resulted in a species of mental

stupefaction. At the time, his brain had held solely to the one point—his refusal to obey.

He could have knelt down in the dust, thanking God with human illogicalness for his own innocence, and seeing no type in the heavens of storm and stress to come.

Passing to a calmer frame of mind he recalled other words spoken by the sculptor in his wrath—words which he had not lightly forgotten, but had allowed to remain in the background of set purpose. Now he brought both them and his callow reflections tremblingly forth into the light. There was as much pain as pleasure in the performance, but he dared to probe more deeply into his thin relations with Josian Trehane than his shrinking sense of a possible guilt had allowed him to do a few hours previously.

He entered the village with his head held several degrees higher than he had yet carried it. His expression was easier, the slight contraction of the brows that deepened the look of furtive horror in his eyes had relaxed, and the look itself lost much of its emphasis by reason of the new contours of the mouth, the drooping sweetness of which was freshened by a tenderly reflective smile.

He had reached the village in safety from the storm and rain. But the ominous signs were gathering in strength, and before these the inhabitants had taken shelter within doors. A group had collected in the smithy, and looked at him curiously as he passed. But from such his history remained inviolate. Barjona Furmedge was a discreet man, not given to babbling against his customers' interests, and Mrs. Summerhayes, the silent woman, had said never a word.

It was to her that Demetrius's thoughts had turned in his trouble, and it was to her house that he directed his footsteps now.

The melancholy aspect of the lonely woman's residence took on deeper shades in the gloom of the impending storm. The untrimmed shrubs hung motionless and lustreless in the heavy air, though a little shivering breeze ruffled the lighter leaves of the ash and poplar saplings from time to time. The long windows had been closed against the tokened deluge, and the house door was shut. There was no sign of human or animal life about the place, and the only sound audible was the fretting of the tiny stream that hurried past the gate.

Demetrius set down his burden and knocked on the door.

After a long interval it was opened by Mrs. Summerhayes herself.

" So ! It is you," she said, cool-eyed and self-possessed as when he had last seen her. " Well, what do you want ? "

Demetrius, in his newly aroused sensibility to exteriors, was at once conscious of a change in her. Gone was the former friendliness, gone was the air of intimacy, and gone, too, in a breath, was his own foolish confidence in her. It was borne in upon him, before he had spoken a word, that probably he had made a mistake in coming. It was as though a cold hand had wiped a feverish moisture from his brow.

He plunged boldly, if somewhat hopelessly, into his case.

" You were kind enough the other day to promise me your help if I needed it," he said.

" Oh, did I go as far as that ? "

Beneath the cool scrutiny of her look, his eyes fell. But his glance rested upon the basket and his errand was thrust again into the forefront of his mind.

" If not," he answered, " I am afraid that I understood your words to imply as much."

She made a slight motion of the shoulders, as though the point was too trivial for argument.

" Well, why have you come ? " she asked.

Demetrius explained. The passion of humanity that had hurried him to her door in open defiance of a ruthless master seemed now too deep-rooted a thing to produce for her scrutiny. He had thought to open his heart to her, even to the revealing of his sudden joy, but struck down by her manner his spirit shrank back upon itself, and the very joy began to wither beneath the blight of her calmly critical eyes. Raising his own as he proceeded with his story, he found that there was more in hers than mere criticism. They held a touch of contempt—even a trace of scorn. This threw him off his balance, so that he halted over the end of his story, thus inducing her to disconcert him further by asking him to repeat it. When he had done so, she looked at him, a faint touch of amusement in her raised brows.

" Upon my word, you are a very cool young man to suppose that I should go to so much trouble on your account ! "

" Then I have made a mistake, madam. I am sorry."

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed a little, holding the door in her hand, as though she would shut it in his face. This time, she had not invited him inside.

" I'm afraid you have made a mistake, Mr. Jordan," she answered. " I have too many troubles of my own to care to shoulder other people's—particularly a stranger's. It was rather an impertinence of you to think it."

Demetrius looked away.

" I suppose it was," he agreed.

" Most assuredly," she insisted.

" But I was misled by your offer of friendship."

" Ah ! my friendship. Why should I be friendly with you ? Tell me that, young sir."

" I can't. I don't know. If I did, I might know other things as well."

She was silent for a moment, still holding the door.

" You have remembered nothing, then ? "

" Nothing."

" God in heaven," she broke out suddenly, " how many people in the world would envy you ! "

Demetrius shook his head.

" Not in my circumstances," he answered with pain.

" The truth," she reminded him, " might not make you any happier."

" I have thought of that. Sometimes the desire is intolerable ; and, again, sometimes the probability of learning it frightens me. To-day, just now, I believed that I had found it."

He had spoken with his eyes on the basket at his feet, but before he had well finished his sentence a sound from Mrs. Summerhayes drew his gaze quickly back to her face. It had undergone a change, and was now alive with animation.

" What do you mean by that ? " she asked. " You have remembered something ! "

" No. It was only that a question forced itself into my mind."

" Please explain."

He did so. The animation faded from her face, leaving it impassive as before.

" That is nothing," she said with a wave of her fingers. " Some other motive may have moved you unconsciously."

" God knows I had nothing to gain ! Mr. Crumpler will probably beat me for disobeying him if he finds it out."

" Many a lad is ready to risk his master's displeasure, even a beating, for the sake of a pair of bright eyes."

"Madam, is it kind to jest in such a way?"

"I am not jesting. I hear there are visitors at the Tower, that is all."

"Yes; there are visitors." For the first time since leaving the Abbey grounds Demetrius remembered that his absence must necessarily incommode Robert Crumpler's guests. He stooped to lift up the basket. "Since you will not help me, madam," he said, "I must go on elsewhere, and get back to the Tower as soon as possible. Mr. Crumpler will be wanting me."

"Apparently," Mrs. Summerhayes remarked dryly. "But as you will doubtless feel the weight of his displeasure you may as well earn it whole-heartedly. The storm will not burst for another half-hour. Come indoors; I will give you some more bread and honey."

Demetrius had fasted since the morning, but he shook his head.

"I would rather go on," he said.

"Nonsense! Besides, I have not said that I will not help you, have I?"

"I understood——"

"Chut!" she retorted, holding the door wide. "You may live to be twice as old as you are, and not understand a woman."

He lifted the basket, and followed her to the room wherein she had entertained him already. She took his burden from him, and laying her hands on his shoulders forced him into the fading light.

"Demetrius Jordan, Demetrius Jordan," she said, her inscrutable eyes on his, "why were you such a fool?"

The words were apparently wrung from her by some hidden emotion lying too deep to make any show upon the surface of her manner. They required no answer; he had none to give. In a moment, moreover, she seemed to have regretted the ebullition of feeling, for she dropped her hands quickly, and sought to wipe from his mind the impression of her implied reproach with its note of bitterness, by turning his attention back to the business which had brought him to her.

She opened the basket. The occupants lay snuggled together in a confused heap of warm puppyhood, but her action disturbed their slumbers, and quiescence became vitality. The woman

bent over the wriggling noisy mass, and her face fell into a softer mould.

" You brought these helpless little creatures to me ? "

" As you see, madam."

" Why ? "

" Because, as I told you, Mr. Crumpler wanted me to drown them."

It was not the answer that she wanted, but small harm was done, for she was scarcely listening to him. Quite suddenly she caught up one of the pups and held it to her bosom with a gesture that might have enlightened her companion as to one fact in her history, had his knowledge of women been greater.

" I will keep them for a while, and find good homes for some of them when they are grown," she said. " They will need careful rearing, but God knows I have little to do. My woman will see to them. Wait for me."

During her absence Demetrius walked to the window, and though the view was limited he saw enough to know that there was now no likelihood of the storm passing off in another direction. If he would neither be exposed to its violence nor be detained by it, he ought to complete his errand at once, and return to the only home which he knew.

Mrs. Summerhayes came back, bearing the empty basket and the promised refreshment. Demetrius explained his position. She waived aside his objections.

" I have done something for you," she said easily, " I have a right to expect a few moments of your society in return. I am a lonely woman, Mr. Jordan, and my tongue grows rusty at times. Talk to me."

Which, Demetrius thought, was hardly the way to exercise her own vocal powers. But courtesy and gratitude alike forbade a denial.

" I can have little to interest a lady," he said. " Our life at the Tower, Mrs. Summerhayes, is as dull as your own."

She flashed a look at him.

" Surely that is not the case now ? " she asked. " I understood that you had visitors."

" Yes "—very slowly—" there are visitors."

" That should certainly liven up the old place," Mrs. Summerhayes remarked, her eyes fixed on the hands folded calmly in her lap. " Who are the people ? "

" Relations of Mr. Crumpler ; two, at least, are."

" Indeed ! That doesn't tell me much. I know none of Mr. Crumpler's relatives."

" The young lady is——"

" Ah ! Of course ; begin with the young lady."

In spite of himself Demetrius reddened, partly through annoyance, partly through some other feeling. Mrs. Summerhayes's eyes were still on her lap.

" She is Mr. Crumpler's niece."

" I was not aware that he had a niece. Who is she ? "

" His sister's daughter, I believe. The name is Trehane. Her father holds some important position, I think, from Mr. Crumpler's talk, though I don't know what it is."

" A wealthy man, perhaps ? " queried the lady with a flicker of interest.

" I don't know."

" Well, she's a handsome young lady at any rate. You know that, I suppose."

" One has only to look at her once to know it," he said.

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed her curious half-mocking laugh.

" Come, come, you improve ! " she cried. " You grow more human. But others have noticed Miss Trehane's good looks besides yourself, perhaps."

" That's not improbable," Demetrius answered with a frown.

" Go on."

" With what, madam ? "

" Your exceedingly able description of the guests."

" There is Mr. Crumpler's stepson, Mr. Drenchard."

" A surly youth. I have heard of him." Clearly Mrs. Summerhayes was not interested in Silas Drenchard. " Any others ? "

" Only Mr. Jermyn, ma'am. Mr. Drenchard's friend."

Her interest in Mr. Jermyn seemed to match hers in young Drenchard.

" No Dorset name," was her sole comment.

" He comes, I believe, from London."

" A fine gentleman, then ? Yes ; I thought he had rather that look."

" You have met him, madam ? "

She shook her head.

" They drove through here this morning," she answered. " I guessed they came from your place. The young lady was very gay. This Mr.—Jerningham——"

" Jermyn, ma'am."

" Oh, of course—Jermyn ; he seemed remarkably attentive to Miss Trehane, I thought."

Demetrius said nothing.

" ' A bit of courting,' I said to myself. Now, am I not right, Mr. Jordan ? "

" I can't tell you, Mrs. Summerhayes. Indeed, how should I know ? You—you forget my position at the Tower."

She mused awhile, chin on hand, her elusive eyes half seen beneath lowered lids.

" Of course," she said at length. " Take care, young sir, that you do not forget it also."

" I am not likely to do that," he answered with embarrassment, for her words, though more delicately pointed, vividly recalled Robert Crumpler's almost brutal statement of the case.

" I should hope not ! " cried Mrs. Summerhayes, regarding him with obvious displeasure. " Well, no doubt Miss Trehane might do worse."

" Than what, madam ? " Demetrius asked with a frown.

She made no reply to that, but fell into her former brooding attitude.

Presently she said :

" And Mr. Crumpler's stepson. What of him ? "

" What of him ? " repeated Demetrius questioningly.

" I was wondering if his sour looks of this morning were on account of the young lady."

" You can hardly expect me to be in Mr. Drenchard's confidence," cried Demetrius with a little anger.

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed.

" No, of course not. But she's pretty enough for any man to risk his soul for, all the same. Not that that's your business, though. Well, 'tis not mine either, you're thinking ; and, indeed, you're right. But any idle gossip serves to interest a lonely woman such as I. Still, for Heaven's sake, don't gossip on t'other side, Mr. Jordan, and tell these fine London folk that a simple widow woman in the village has been talking about them."

Demetrius was on his feet, the basket in his hand, ready to depart. He answered with natural dignity.

" I shall not forget what I owe to you, Mrs. Summerhayes, and what is due to you in return," he said.

" Good boy ! " she cried mockingly, patting his shoulder.

" Yes, 'tis clear, whatever you are now you were once a gentleman. And that, on my life, is the pity of it ! There is one thing more," she added quickly. " Do not mention my observation of the pleasure party this morning. The truth is, they failed to notice me, and I would not for the world have it said that Mary Summerhayes plays the spy ! "

" No one surely would accuse you of that," said Demetrius, who had never heard her real name.

A minute later he left the house—and it was as though he had left his joyous mood behind him. In truth, it had fallen from him on the doorstep, and he did not gather it up on his way out. Mrs. Summerhayes watched him to the gate. She closed the door with a little vicious thrust.

" Upon my soul," she muttered, " I could find it in my heart to pity him, if it weren't for his face—and the mistake that he has made ! "

XVIII

CANDLE-ENDS

THE edge of the storm had touched by now the outskirts of the village. Heavy peals of thunder rattled over Demetrius's head as he made his way back to the main street. Rain was falling thick and fast, swelling the little runnels by the roadside until they reached the dimensions of brooks, turning the larger streams into small rivers. All around, in the momentary pauses of the storm, arose the hissing sound of running water. If fell in long grey streaks from the leaden skies, and gleamed with a silvery wanness from the ground beneath. Demetrius, splashing through puddles and missing the stepping-stones in the drive and beat of the rain, his poorly clad form and bare head making him the very sport of the elements, might have cried out with dual significance: "All Thy waves and Thy storms have gone over me!"

Nor was it alone with the physical effects of the disturbance that he had to contend. With every sudden vivid rending of the inky gloom overhead, with every mighty roar that followed it so swiftly that at times the apparent rule of nature seemed to be reversed and the discharge to precede the flash, the young man's every fibre, nerve and tissue answered with an acuteness of sympathy that rendered him for the moment less than a man, a mere infinitesimal atom of the storm itself, gathered up, heart and brain and spirit, into the vast microcosm that flung its ruthless energies around him. The sense of shrinking which the distant storm had aroused in him was swallowed up in an awe no less painful and far more overwhelming. Dizzy, bewildered, blinded by the lightning, his whole nature reeling as beneath some physical shock, he stumbled and floundered on, the one moving human figure in a world of shifting lights and uproar.

Yet his mind retained an unthinking grip of his errand and the peculiar necessities of his case. So that inclination was mastered

by the sense of duty, and his steps were turned away from Barjona's cottage, and directed instead towards the village shop which Robert Crumpler had indicated in speech earlier in the day. Had anyone intercepted the stumbling feet and asked Demetrius his business, he would have had to regrip his memory and restring his nerves before he could have told.

Dazed, drenched to the skin, and wild-eyed, he broke at length into the gloomy little shop, which had closed its half-door against the storm, and was now sheltering some half-dozen of the village folk. At Demetrius's unexpected entrance there was a lull in the gossip, and one of the talkers rose up quickly to catch him in his arms. It was Barjona Furmedge.

"Lard-a-massy, lad!" he cried. "What be doen here?"

Demetrius dropped down upon an upturned box, and looked round. His face was colourless and dripping with the rain, the curious expression of half-concealed horror was more pronounced than usual. He drew his wet sleeve across his cheek, and said a foolish thing.

"The storm—it got into my eyes!"

Some one laughed at him. Little known as he was, he had already the reputation of being "a bit o' a oddity."

Barjona patted his shoulder.

"Never you heed 'em, lad," he said. "Sit awhile and get thy breath! 'Tes a tar'ble starm right enough. Nigh so bad as the last."

"The last, 'Jona?" queried a neighbour tentatively. "I don't mind he. But there, my head be like a sieve, so much comes out as gooes in. When were the last starm, eh?"

"I mind," said another, before the tranter could reply. "'Twas the day the Prince coome to Darchester; last hang-fair."

Furmedge felt Demetrius begin to shiver beneath his horny palm. He turned sharply on the speaker.

"There's enough!" he said. "You and your melancoyly talk, when the pore lad's fair miz-mazed as 'tes. Coome inside," he added to Demetrius, leading the way to the little parlour in the rear of the shop, "and sit quiet awhile. Maybe Meäster Podger'll get ye a sip o' cider."

Demetrius accompanied him like a child, fell into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Each thunder-clap set him shuddering anew, but the storm was passing, and by degrees

the quietude and shelter of the room, and the tranter's homely sympathy, enabled him to regain his mastery over himself. Presently he set down the cider mug and met his companion's gaze with a look of shame. Meeting there an expression of almost affectionate comprehension, he put out his hand and as quickly let it fall again untouched to his side.

"I needn't say I'm glad to see 'ee, lad," began the tranter cheerfully.

"No, Mr. Furmedge; you've always been good to me. You don't change."

"Why, who do, then? Have Meäster Crumpler tarned ye out?"

"No. I came of my own accord. I wanted to see Mrs. Summerhayes."

"Ah! now, she's a friend to ye."

Demetrius looked gloomily on the floor.

"Ben't she?" questioned the tranter.

"I used to believe so. But now I'm not sure. I can't understand it. I can't think of anything just now. The storm has upset me. I came for the candle-ends. I think I ought to be getting back."

"Bide a bit, till your head be stidier. What makes ye think as Mrs. Summerhayes ben't your friend now?"

"It wasn't so much what she said as her manner. She was cold, as if I had done something to offend her."

Furmedge looked puzzled.

"That couldn't be," he said.

"Of course not. I haven't seen her since the day I came to you. But, Barjona, I fancied—I almost thought——"

"Well, well?"

"Come closer! I wondered whether by any chance she had —found out anything!"

"Lard forbid!" cried the tranter, starting back with a shocked face.

There was a short pause. Furmedge regarded the wet miserable figure with kindly compassionate eyes. Then he once more laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Don't 'ee fret about she," he advised. "'Tes along of her bein' a woman. All the sect is so tricky as the wind. Even the girt wise Solomon in all his glory couldn't unnerstand 'em, I take it. To-morrow you'll find her so kind as she's cold to-day. Don't be hurt for a cross word, my bwoy."

"I wish I knew," muttered Demetrius restlessly. "If she finds out—others may."

"Nay, nay——"

The young face, bearing the stress of its strange experiences, was still grave and troubled. This thing went even deeper than the homely sympathizer guessed. Demetrius was at this moment thinking of Josian Trehane. Then his features pinched suddenly; lines of pain appeared, his brows drew together, the whole assuming a bleak withered appearance that horrified the old man at his side. For the time it was as though the tranter was once more looking at the face of him whom he had brought at nightfall from the door of Dorchester Gaol—the face revealed by his own lantern's light shaking in Robert Crumpler's hand. Demetrius spoke with obvious effort.

"Barjona," he said, in a low voice, "there's one thing I ought to know and have never been told. I'm a coward; I've been afraid to ask. Tell me now—at once, before my mind changes! It's this! Who was it, and how do they say I did it? Tell me now!"

Barjona rumpled his hair with his broad palm, feeling a natural embarrassment.

"Let it bide, lad," he mumbled. "Let it bide. 'Tes Lard has set the seal o' forgetfulness on your mind. He don't mean ye to know."

"I must know! Tell me, before I become a coward again!"

His fingers were round the other's wrist, nervous yet strong in their grip. His manner could not fail to be impressive to one who had lived in simple ways among homely people all his life.

"Barjona, if you don't tell me," he urged, "I shall ask Mr. Crumpler. He won't refuse to speak. And he'll tell it less gently than you; he'll make it hurt ten times more. You know that."

Furmedge slowly yielded to this argument, for he guessed it to be true. The old sculptor's tongue had never spared Demetrius in his presence. But he spoke uneasily, nevertheless.

"Why," he said, "as to the name o' the party, I can't tell 'ee that. I've forgot 'n. That's God's truth, my lad, and no lie. I'd not lie to 'ee, seein' as you trust me. And as to the manner o'—doen it, why, they said as 'twas a stab in his sleep, the pair o' ye bein' shelteren in a loft, and a'terwards——"

" Yes, yes ? "

" A lime-kiln."

" A—lime-kiln ? Do you mean——? "

Furmedge nodded, not meeting the scared eyes.

" To destroy the evidence ? "

Again the tranter nodded heavily.

" Oh, my God ! . . . And was it proved that I was there ? . . . In his sleep ? . . . I don't believe it ! Oh, my God, no ! Was it proved, I say ? Was there no doubt at all ? "

Furmedge brightened. He ventured to look at his companion.

" Oh, plenty o' doubt to some men's way o' thinken," he said.

" You've not told me all ! You're keeping something back ! Something important. They couldn't have hanged me just because I happened to be there ! "

" Let 'a be, lad, let 'a be ! There were folks as said——"

" I don't want to know what they said. I want to know what happened. Was I there ? "

" You were both there at evenen' time. An' nex' marnen—only you alone."

" I alone ! Yes—what else ? That didn't prove anything against me by itself."

" Anyhow, they arrested you on suspicion."

" For God's sake," whispered Demetrius passionately, " don't try to spare me ! I can bear it. I shall ask Mr. Crumpler ! There must have been more evidence than that ! "

" There was a little bottle as they said had held a drug," Furmedge admitted under this further pressure, but like a man who spoke against the grain. " And on your shirt sleeve, just above the wrist, they found a smear o'——"

" Blood ! " gasped Demetrius, and went from white to red and back to white again.

Furmedge said nothing. Presently Demetrius sat down quietly and drew his breath more easily.

" I know the worst now," he said in a passionless voice. " It is best so."

Again he was thinking of Josian Trehane. In his heart, stirring feebly beneath all other emotions, was a great thankfulness that she had never touched his hands.

" And the weapon ? " he asked, after a pause. " Did they find that ? "

Furmedge was glad to be able to shake his head. He dreaded further questioning, for bad though the case looked he had not yet revealed the worst. But in another moment Demetrius practically had asked for it.

"Was there a lime-kiln near?"

"There were; 'bout a quarter o' a mile away."

"What made them suspect me of throwing him in there?"

Barjona hesitated.

"Come!" Demetrius's wits were working more steadily now, and he spoke with some sharpness. "I must know all."

"They said," began the shuffling tranter, "leastways woone feller did, as he saw a man nigh on midnight a-stoopen under a heavy burthen . . . and a-pushin' of 'en into the kiln."

Demetrius was silent for a long time, thinking with painful intensity. The room was very quiet. The fury of the storm had died down, and the gossips had left the shop some time previously. The proprietor could be seen moving about in the yard behind the parlour. The two were quite alone.

"I must have been a good deal stronger than I am now," Demetrius said, "if I could get a man down from a loft and carry him for a quarter of a mile."

Barjona nodded.

"'Twas urged for ye at the trial."

"And what account did I give of myself?"

"You hadn't much to say at all—that I can call to mind."

"I must have said something."

"Only that you'd quarrelled wi' your friend, an' made it up in a sart o' a way and had a bit o' supper together, and laid down to sleep and found in the marnen as he wa'n't there."

Demetrius gave a little bitter laugh.

"Well, if that's all I said I don't wonder that they found me guilty. But there's a point, Barjona, that vexes me still. If I had done it, shouldn't I have run away at once, instead of returning to the loft?"

"So the larned gen'leman asked at the trial. And the girt judge said as how there wa'n't no 'counten for the workens o' a man's mind after he'd done a murder, an' you med ha' reckoned to feäce it out better so."

"That's true," said Demetrius despairingly. "And was I arrested at once?"

"Not till next day."

"Where?"

" Over to Worth Matravers."

Instantly a look of puzzled distress darkened the young fellow's eyes. He repeated the name wonderingly. Then sighed, and shook his head. In another minute he arose, looked round wearily, and caught sight of the basket standing where Furmedge had placed it when he took it from him. It reminded him that there was a present to reckon with as well as a past.

" And that's all you have to tell me, Barjona ? " he said.

" More'n enough, ben't it, lad ? "

" One more thing," said the young man, pausing on his way to the door. " In all this hateful business was there ever any mention of a woman ? "

The tranter stared blankly at him.

" A woman ? Love 'ee, lad, no ! Not as I ever heard on. Why do 'ee ask ? "

Demetrius made no reply to that. The woman of the handkerchief, she who had once blessed him, must, it seemed, remain as great a mystery as ever. But if her message had been the most soul-devastating curse he could not have felt more utterly weighed down by his inward torments and dreads. He put out a listless hand and opened the door.

" I came here for candle-ends, Barjona," he said. " You have given them to me indeed ! And they show me hideous things. But they'll have to suffice until something lights the big lamp of truth for me. Even now, nothing's quite certain, nothing's quite sure, is it, Barjona ? "

He turned an earnest, wistful face to the troubled tranter, who followed him, and repeated his former soothing gesture of laying his arm across the young fellow's shoulders.

" Nay, nay, my lad, let a' bide, I say. Lay your burthens at the Saviour's feet, and leave the rest to Him."

" You think I am guilty, Barjona ? Do you, do you ? "

" I'd not dare to say that," replied the old man gently. " But, if you be, I'm thinken the A'mighty'll accept such repentance as yours, an' make 'ee clean through sufferen, my lad."

" No, don't take my hand yet, Barjona. And, for God's sake, don't let Mr. Crumpler know what we've been talking about. He would only mock at me."

" You needn't hev asked me that," said the honest fellow as they passed together into the shop.

A few moments later they parted in the street. Rain was still falling, but in a thick drizzle instead of in a deluge, and the

heavy clouds had lightened somewhat. The air was already pleasantly cool and vibrant once more. The roadway still streamed with water but had the appearance of having been washed clean by the recent flood. Sounds travelled far. From a distance the carolling of a jubilant blackbird came clearly to the village street, and lower down the road could be heard the approach of some vehicle coming on at a rapid pace.

Demetrius trudged away, but the tranter remained to breathe a few cool draughts of the purified air before returning home.

While he waited the oncoming carriage raced through the village. And a few minutes later he saw Mrs. Summerhayes coming towards him.

"Well, Furmedge," she asked a little sharply, "and what are you doing here?"

He told her that he had just parted from Meäster Crumpler's young man.

"Has he only just gone?" she inquired. "What was he talking of all this time?"

"Himself, mostly, ma'am."

"I should hope so! Not of me?"

"He did say as he'd seen 'ee, ma'am. No more'n that."

Mrs. Summerhayes seemed relieved.

"For," she said, in explanation, "it would be the greatest impertinence in one of his sort to gossip about a lady."

"O' coorse, ma'am," Furmedge agreed, looking troubled, nevertheless.

Mrs. Summerhayes was quick to notice his mood.

"Well, what is it?" she cried.

Barjona cleared his throat.

"A small thing to you, ma'am, but a girt woone to that pore lad," he said. "He seemed a bit downhearted, a' did, about the way you'd treated him to-day."

She was silent for a moment, staring coldly up the street. At length she turned, and met the tranter's appealing eye.

"How should I treat such as he?" she demanded. "What right has he to complain? Many a decent woman would not speak to him at all—much less let him cross her threshold! I have allowed him both privileges, as you know."

Furmedge's face did not clear.

"But, ma'am," he expostulated boldly, "'tesn't for us to judge en. We don't know naught. He may be guilty, God help him, or he may be innocent, pore lad——"

Mrs. Summerhayes made a gesture of impatience.

"Innocent? Is that what you think?" she asked.

"Don't you yourself, ma'am?"

"He's as guilty as Cain and as cowardly as Peter!" she cried.

XIX

CONSEQUENCES

THE chaise, driven at a terrific rate by Lawrence Jermyn, passed Demetrius before he had well left the village, but although it was the only vehicle on the road he gave it but little notice, and altogether failed to recognize its drenched and huddled occupants.

He plodded along doggedly, his thoughts keeping him gloomy company. His return to the Tower at all was a perfunctory action of the limbs obeying an instinct of a mind too dulled with misery to be capable of reasoning out any better proceeding. Neither slackening nor heartening his pace he made his way down the long road that led to the mill, and turned in the same apathetic manner into the lane that brought him to the Abbey. It was now close on six o'clock. He had been away nearly four hours. Absent without leave. A dull wonder as to what his master would say crossed his mind as he stepped into the court-yard ; but it drifted away again like smoke in clear air.

He might have added to his iniquities by failing to report his return as soon as possible, had he not, on raising his eyes after bolting and barring the great doors which he had found open, caught sight of a strange chaise viewed through the dusky vista of the gatehouse. For a moment the blood flew to his heart, almost choking him, then the familiar figure of young Drenchard came into sight, leading the carriage away in the direction of the stables.

The little incident helped Demetrius to pull himself together somewhat. A sense of present responsibility was aroused, and he decided, come what might of it, to brave Crumpler's wrath without delay. In his dominating mood he was even inclined to welcome any incident, however distasteful, that should turn his thoughts away for the time from the brooding horror. So, although his personal quarters were in the gatehouse, and some small change of clothing might have been effected, he went

forward in his saturated garments, his fair head sleek and shining in the yellow sunlight which now penetrated the dispersing rain-clouds.

The whereabouts of the old sculptor was not hard to find. His presence proclaimed itself loudly through the open windows of the living room, which emitted a running fire of shrill-voiced volubility, criss-crossed at intervals by half-amused expostulation in crisp girlish tones, and coolly satirical observations that threw the old man's harsh invective into higher relief. Demetrius went at once to the room, nothing doubting as to the meaning of it all. He flung open the half-closed door and went in.

At sight of him Crumpler yelled out an imprecation and then paused, gasping; which gave Demetrius an opportunity of saying as he opened the basket:

"I have brought you the candle-ends, sir."

"Candle-ends?" shrieked Crumpler, flourishing a sinewy fist in the young man's face. "Who gave you leave to go off to fetch candle-ends, you gallivantin' young rip, you? Didn't I say——"

"You said you wanted the wax for Miss Trehane's bust, sir. Only this afternoon you told me so."

"Oh, you remember that, do you? And can't you call to mind that I gave you another job to do, and bade ye stay at home against the visitors' return, and said the candle-ends could wait?"

Demetrius said nothing. But he stood his ground in a way that looked like insolence but was in reality mere indifference. Indifference up to a certain point. For, in the slight pause, he glanced round and his eyes fell on Josian's face. She was frankly smiling. Instantly a little pugnaciousness leavened his apathetic mood. Still he said no word, and in another moment the chance to defend himself was gone, for Crumpler burst out into a volley of abuse, which drove the fair listener as far as the door—where she waited to hear the rest. At the close of the tirade, made biting by covert allusions to the young man's unhappy antecedents, Crumpler put the question for which Demetrius, since Josian's smile had put his wits into working order, had been waiting.

"You went out against my commands; that's one count against you, and you shall pay for it! Didn't I say when I took you into my service that you were never to leave the grounds unless I gave ye permission? What's the use of a servant that

I can't trust to obey me? Answer me that? You won't, eh? Turned sullen, have 'ee? By the Lord that made me I'll find a way to cure 'ee of such manners, or I'll send 'ee back to the place ye came from. They'd be fain to clap eyes on ye again, and so you know, you sinner! I told you to get rid of the dogs! Have 'ee done that, or have 'ee disobeyed me there as well? Speak out, for the devil take me if I ask it a second time!"

Demetrius opened his lips to reply as composedly as he could with the old man's wrathful face thrust close against his own, but another voice struck in as soon as Crumpler drew breath. Silas Drenchard had strolled into the room, and now made answer in his habitual surly way.

"The pups are gone," he said. "I've just been to the stables."

Crumpler's face relaxed by a hair's-breadth. He fell back a pace.

"Ha," he cried, his eyes glittering evilly, "'tis well for 'ee that you've obeyed me there, or not an inch o' skin I'd ha' left on thy back, my lad. As it is, you've to pay dearly enough for t'other bit o' daring, and on my soul I'd not ha' spared ye——"

Demetrius spoke. His voice was quite firm.

"Don't spare me," he said. "I didn't obey you. I took the puppies to the village. I didn't drown them."

For a moment Crumpler stood, his face working, his frame bent, his fingers clutching the air. His rage robbed him for the time of articulation. Almost instinctively Drenchard made a movement forward, but Jermyn caught him and held him back. Josian still waited in the doorway, but she smiled no longer.

"What?" shrieked Crumpler. "You dare to tell me that?"

"I'm not ashamed of it," said Demetrius.

"By God," the other cried, "I'll make 'ee ashamed! You shall be begging for mercy afore I've a-done wi' you! You shall taste o' shame; you shall be taught that ye can't disobey me without paying for the fun. 'Tis twice you've gone against me! Admit it, you young rake-hell, admit it, I say!"

"I have admitted it."

"Very well! These folk hear ye! Ye've gone out without leave, and ye've maliciously disobeyed me—and ye've admitted both charges. That's enough! I'll not stand it, you that swore to be my—ha! show 'em your breast! Show 'em the letters, I say!"

For the first time since he had entered the room, Demetrius showed signs of discomposure. He began to be conscious of the fact that Robert Crumpler had it in his power to wound more than his body. In truth, for his flesh at this moment he cared little. The thought of physical pain was almost welcomed by the contrast with the greater agony of the mind. Nor, had he been solely in the presence of the three men, would Crumpler have had any power to move him at all. But Josian Trehane was to be a witness to his humiliation, and this fact was enough to turn an incident into an event of a memorable kind. Meanwhile, she herself had made a movement, coming a little farther into the room.

"Uncle," she said quickly, unheeding Jermyn's outstretched hand, "let him go! He's wet and we're hungry. I'm sure you're making a great to-do about nothing."

Crumpler turned on her with a snarl.

"Hold your tongue, vixen!" he cried. "He's my servant, not yours! He's not even a servant like the rest: he's a bit o' property o' mine—picked out of the gutter, rot him! Bought for five guineas like the carcase of a pig! See here, my girl, you've fallen in love with his handsome face, maybe! I'll tell 'ee who he is! He's the sweeping-out of a——"

Josian closed her ears and stamped her foot. She was very angry; her face was flaming. For some reason she did not look at Demetrius, though her wrath for the moment was quite as much with him as with her uncle.

Crumpler's sentence was left unfinished, for Demetrius himself deliberately turned the frenzied old man's thought back into the old channel. There was, as he quickly understood, only one way of doing this; and, though it brought upon himself the very humiliation he had shrunk from a moment before, it was the lesser evil of the two. For all he could tell, in another instant, his whole shameful history would be shrieked into the girl's ears.

With a quick movement he tore open the clothing at his breast, and showed the letters burning dully on the white flesh.

Crumpler pointed a shaking finger at them.

"Tell 'em what they mean!" he ordered shrilly.

"They mean that I'm your servant," Demetrius answered, not raising his head.

"They mean more 'an that!" cried Crumpler. "They mean that you're my Trusty Servant! That's what they stand

for, and by the Lord that made you my trusty servant you shall be! Here! give me that!"

He reached out for the stout stick which during his hours of leisure was seldom out of his grasp.

"Hold his hands, one of ye!" he cried.

Jermyn stepped forward smiling, and performed that office to perfection. Throughout what followed he had an air of sympathetic participation out of proportion with his passive service. It gave the impression to Drenchard, looking idly on, that he was vicariously working off some old grudge against his former friend.

As the first blow fell Josian drew back. Her expressive face showed neither compassion nor alarm. But wonder was there, in parted lips and dilated eyes, wonder that a grown man in the full tide of lusty young life should submit without a struggle to being beaten like a lad caught robbing an orchard. And very soon the wonder passed into contempt—a feeling which was double-edged and turned one sharp extremity upon herself. A little scornful sound broke involuntarily from her, and Demetrius, hearing it, turned his eyes for one instant in her direction. Immediately, it was to the girl as though half the burden of his shame had fallen upon herself. Her gaze was abashed, and the blood rushed to her face. She was distressed beyond measure, fascinated yet inert. For in that moment she had looked unwillingly into the agonized depths of a man's soul.

The blows went on long after the trivial delinquencies might have been supposed to be atoned for. Very soon Demetrius was bending under them, but he made no attempt, beyond the endeavour to shield his face, to shirk the penalty of a single stroke. Why he acted in this passive way he scarcely knew. For one thing, he felt himself, in the presence of the other two men, to be powerless of defence. Jermyn's hands were gripping him strongly and Drenchard, carelessly interested, was lounging against the door. A struggle could have ended only in an undignified defeat. And, moreover, at the back of his mind was still the pitiless desire for anything which would lull the keener anguish of his soul. It was only when Josian's cry drew his eyes to her scornful face that he found a full measure of spiritual suffering even in this.

And then the time for resistance had passed. He was leaning forward, pressing heavily upon Jermyn for support. The coat was soon ripped from his shoulders, the open shirt was torn into

ribbons, and showed the red and swollen flesh beneath. A dull sense of pain crept over his whole body. At length even Jermyn's grip failed to keep him on his feet. He dropped to his knees, and the sudden change of position brought his punishment to an unexpected end.

The last blow tore open the lobe of his left ear. A trickle of blood ran down, and the old man stamped with rage.

"That's spoilt the modelling for to-morrow!" he cried, flinging down the stick which his niece had been trying in vain to wrest from his hand. "Curse you! why didn't you stand still?"

He bent over the drooping figure, the outraged master sunk in the apprehensive artist, and examined the injury eagerly.

"'Tis sure to swell," he pronounced disgustedly. "'Twas thy fault—dropping down like that! I'm a clean workman always. There, get up, you fool, and go and bathe it with cold water at once. A cold water compress may keep the swelling down. I must have that ear to-morrow."

Jermyn laughed outright at Crumpler's distress. Even Drenchard was smiling sourly at the almost ludicrous ending of the affair.

"I'm afraid," said the former with dry humour, as he roughly jerked Demetrius to his feet, "that you've spoilt his figure for artistic purposes for a few days to come. That's the pity of having your servant and your sitter in one."

"That's not the worst of it," Drenchard struck in grumbingly. "Hang his figure! You've spoilt our supper, and I'm devilish sharp-set. Look at him! He's not fit to get us anything now."

All looked at Demetrius, who appeared indifferent to gibes and abuse alike. Then Josian spoke in a quick, nervous way.

"Leave him alone!" she said and she caught Jermyn's arm. "Don't worry about supper, Cousin Silas, I'll see to that, and Mr. Jermyn, I'm sure, will come and help me."

"Of course, with pleasure, Miss Trehane."

One by one they left the room, and when, some half-hour later, Josian returned to it Demetrius had gone. She laid the table thoughtfully, and during the meal that followed she missed the tall figure waiting silently in the background with a grace no other servant of her acquaintance had ever possessed; missed, too, his swift attention to her wants, and the interest which his mere presence conveyed when the talk of the others became either

too academic or too trivial, according as to whether that of the host or the guests was in the ascendant.

The meal, of her own preparing, lacked savour, the few remarks of her companions were dull and devoid of interest. The younger men had even less to say than their host, whose temper had not yet settled down. She herself said nothing at all.

Only when the tedious meal was nearing its end did she rouse herself to take notice of the others. Watching their several faces unobserved, she found that Jermyn had relapsed into an unusual thoughtfulness, and not infrequently turned his gaze towards young Drenchard. At such times Josian fancied that a curious questioning, almost an appraising expression darkened his fine eyes. The object of this attention, for his part, seemed unaware of the scrutiny, and did nothing more interesting than scowl at his stepfather and grumble at his food.

Crumpler sat with his back to the light; Josian was opposite. Her clear gaze fell upon his wrinkled features, which were still working convulsively, and what she saw there boded no good, or so she thought, to the unlucky Demetrius. She fell to thinking anew of the young man, and in her mind reviewed her decorous intimacy with her uncle's servant. Of late, her gay gibes had been modified. She no longer cried out "Now then, Larkheels!" when she trod on his feet in her merry tripping to and fro. But this was partly because Lawrence Jermyn had temporarily drawn her mind away. The painful incident of the evening had sent her back into the old groove of thought, and the vicious expression of the lean old jaws opposite determined her to make some endeavour to protect Demetrius from further ill-treatment that night.

She was shrewd enough to be aware that to attempt this by means of a direct appeal to his sense of justice or latent humanity would be to defeat her end. The only thing to be done was to win him if possible to a more amiable mood.

There was a sure way of achieving this. In spite of his strong and rugged character, Robert Crumpler could always be moved by an appeal to that appreciation of his own genius which to crude minds appeared no more than personal vanity—a sentiment which had been fostered by the undoubted neglect of his artistic contemporaries. While acquitting him of the grosser form of the quality, Josian knew that his belief in himself was sufficiently strong to prevent him from suspecting insincerity in the expressed admiration of others.

" Uncle," she said as the men rose from the table, " are you going to be busy this evening ? "

" What makes you ask ? " he demanded with a sour look.

Josian plucked up heart. His return to a more refined form of speech indicated a calmer frame of mind.

" Because," she answered with spirit, " I was going to ask you to show these gentlemen some of your treasures."

Jermyn, who had been strolling out of the room, suddenly paused and looked back.

" Eh ? What treasures ? " Crumpler asked, his eyes fixed on the girl in a fierce glare.

" Oh, your own work, of course. They're your greatest possessions, are they not ? I'm sure they are."

Jermyn continued to walk towards the door, cynical indifference replacing his previous look of interest.

Crumpler continued to eye his niece, but his moroseness broke suddenly into covert mockery. He stretched out his forefinger and touched her chin. His eyes had taken on a narrow cunning look.

" You know better than that," he said.

Again Jermyn paused.

" I'm sure I don't understand, sir," protested Josian—nor did she, for the moment.

The old sculptor bent towards her. He took no count of the man listening in the background.

" You know I've got a treasure that I show to none," he said with a slyness that made his meaning plain to Sir John Trehane's daughter. " Something that 'ud make a man's fortune, eh ? Something that your father came here after and couldn't get. You know that, eh ? A treasure worth a mint o' money ; a treasure worth all manner o' precious things, worth a man's fortune and fame, eh ? Worth, once upon a time, a man's life ! "

Josian stepped back, flushing a little, painfully conscious of the man in the background. She understood that her uncle was speaking of the reprieve.

The moment was a trying one for an undeclared accomplice. Crumpler's sudden allusion had taken her by surprise. Her discomfiture was increased by the fact that Jermyn left his post at the door and came forward to join in the conversation. He spoke before she could reply.

" And what may this most valuable possession be ? " he inquired as airily as though only an idle interest moved him.

Crumpler turned on him at once. The potentiality of the situation pleased him.

"Ah! Reckon you'd like to know," he said. "But 'tisn't for knowing, nor for showing, young sir. 'Tis a mortal curiosity, and worth more to me than most, though 'twould make the fortune of any man. Eh, Niece Josian, what do you say?"

Josian knew well enough that anyone offering the stolen reprieve to her father could assuredly make a good bargain out of it. Self-consciousness, mortification, and a little personal reproach held her silent. The letter apprising her father of her cousin's presence at the Tower should have been written days ago. Almost was she tempted to abandon Demetrius to his fate, and go and write it at once. A moment's reflection chilled the impulse. There was a strain of sound judgment hidden away among those scatter-brains of hers, and she saw that immediate retreat would not only gratify the old man and weaken her assumed position of an undesigning visitor, but might also concentrate Jermyn's attention by arousing his curiosity. Therefore she stood her ground boldly, and, with a little shrug of the shoulders, said:

"Don't talk in riddles, please, uncle. I asked you to let Mr. Jermyn see those wonderful ivory carvings of yours that you showed me the other day, and you puzzle us both by talking like a magician in a fairy-tale."

"Does Mr. Jermyn want to see the ivories?" demanded the sculptor, directing a glance at the younger man.

"Of course," Josian answered at once, also throwing a look at Jermyn, who was still standing waiting just inside the room. "At any rate, I want to see them again."

Her uncle's guest had been particular in his attentions to her throughout the day, and it was only to be supposed that where she went he would desire to be also. Her glance was practically an invitation.

"Let the man answer for himself, niece," Crumpler returned pettishly.

Thus pressed, and having his own objects in view, Jermyn came forward.

"I'm dying to see any further specimens of your art, sir, which you may be pleased to show," he protested, returning Josian's friendly look with interest.

"The wretch!" she thought; for though his attentions had

not displeased her, she now remembered the almost active part which he had taken in the scene before supper.

But she smiled on him winsomely, and he, for all his varied experience of the sex, took it for encouragement.

"Well," said Crumpler, after a short pause, and speaking in a mollified tone, "if the pair of ye's so terribly anxious, I'll show ye the ivories. But they're valuable, mind—very valuable. A rare collection. 'Tis in my mind to 'queath 'em to the National Gallery, so that folks may see my quality after I'm dust and ashes. Ay, damn 'em, the quality o' the man as they despised an' neglected when he was a living soul!"

"Come, come," soothed his niece's soft voice—and she could coo very charmingly when she chose—"such genius as yours wasn't made to be neglected for ever. Some day the fools will wake up to their mistake."

She had slipped her arm through his, but he shook it away and stood fixing her with his fierce penetrating look.

"Do you think me a genius, niece?" he cried. "Does your father? Does Mr. Jermyn there? No, no, ne'er a one of ye! There's only my son Silas who believes in me—and the lad, for all he's no blood o' mine, shan't lose by it. 'Twill all be his when I'm gone—house and grounds, lock, stock and barrel, all the treasures, all the plant, all the ivories. There's but little money—not what there ought to be, for they've never given me a fair wage—but the rest. Ah! the rest——"

"Yes," Jermyn struck in softly as the old man paused, "the rest, eh?"

The sound of his voice checked for good the flow of Crumpler's words. He seemed to realize that he was speaking unguardedly in presence of a stranger. All at once his manner changed. The half-crazy vehemence that characterized both speech and gestures when his emotions were aroused died down into the ordinary behaviour of everyday life. Josian—unaware of the deadly springs which her innocent action had set in motion—was eminently satisfied at the change.

Together the three went into the studio, Jermyn now exhibiting a positive anxiety to make himself agreeable to his host, and Josian flitting gaily from corner to corner, touching unfinished bust and statuette, asking a score of questions and listening deferentially to her uncle's replies. There was only one model of which her glancing eyes apparently took no heed—the clay Prometheus hanging painfully from his rock was still exposed to

view, for Crumpler had been at work upon the draperies after Demetrius had been released. She passed it with a bare glance, but Jermyn stood watching thoughtfully while the sculptor covered the clay model with a damp sheet.

The Flora bust, a dainty and well-executed conception, occupied a prominent position, and engrossed the attention for some minutes. Crumpler was never loath to speak of his art and methods; and a few judicious questions from the girl presently won him to a more amiable mood.

" Fragile ? " he cried in reply to a remark from her. " Well, wax of itself is a delicate medium, I'll allow ! What d'ye say to the likeness, Mr. Jermyn ? Look at that eyebrow ! And the curve o' the lower lip ! "

" Exquisite ! " murmured Jermyn, allowing his glance as he compared the bust with the sitter to linger longer upon the fair flesh than upon the clay.

" Two or three more sittings," Crumpler went on, drawing a delicate finger down Flora's cheek, " and 'twill be ready for the casting. We've got the wax. I shall want you to-morrow, niece, now that that fool Demetrius has got himself spoilt."

Jermyn's lips twitched cynically at the reference. Josian drew away.

" We're forgetting the carvings," she said.

XX

ON HOLY SOIL

HALF an hour later Jermyn came out of the studio yawning. To spend so long a time in affected admiration of an art of which one neither knows nor desires to know anything, and to be wearied by the technical explanations of an enthusiastic craftsman, is trying in any circumstances. But, when to the inevitable tedium is added a keen curiosity in a different direction, the experience is not calculated to soothe a temper naturally intolerant of all that makes for personal discomfort.

So it was that Lawrence Jermyn, following the others from the room into the open air and yawning behind their backs, found himself for all his fair companion's charms—and she had been provocative enough in the studio, cool and yet arch—in no humour to continue the relations which he had been practising towards the Home Secretary's daughter all day. Bad temper and a lover's guise go ill together. Accordingly, he yearned for the society in which he could give his ill humour full play.

Josian, for her part, offered him no encouragement to pursue her at that moment. In truth, it was, for the present, her coolness which was genuine and her lighter mood which was feigned. And now that she had used him for her purpose as an unconscious accessory to her design of improving her uncle's temper, she no longer wished for his society. The amusement which he afforded was superficial beside the interest which Demetrius had created ; and, though his undoubted brilliancy had dazzled her for a while, she was beginning to wonder how much, perhaps how little, stability lurked behind it.

Jermyn, deserted by his companions, strolled moodily across the smooth sward, and, seating himself upon a fragment of broken wall, stared thoughtfully at the mouldering remains of the monastic graveyard.

It was a spot peculiarly adapted to meditation. Well away

from the Tower itself, and shut in on the north side by a ruined wall, and on the south by the river which entered the grounds near this point, the small patch of earth which held in its bosom the earthly remains of abbots and brothers was sunk some few feet below the common level, and offered no extensive view on any side but one. Away to the west the ground was open. The whole formed the site of the long demolished chapel which had once raised its chants and dirges into air that was tremulous now only with the murmur of those woody denizens the lives of which outlast the strength of a man—the spot chosen by Jermyn being the ruined chancel of the vanished structure.

But the thoughts which moved with a slow current through man's calculating brain were not attuned to the solemnity of the place. Serious they were; but of an eminently worldly seriousness. For in this quiet hour, surrounded by the evidences of decay and mortality, he was allowing himself to face the problem of life with a concentration which he rarely accorded to so important a matter.

Hitherto he had for the most part lived by his wits, enjoying to the full the pleasure of the moment, and careless of what might follow. Burdened with neither scruples nor sympathy, he had acted upon a natural assumption that every day would bring its own opportunity which he would not hesitate to use for his own advantage. Only in one instance had he made careful provision for the future, and, as the attempt had ended less prosperously than such commendable foresight had deserved, he had since flung discretion overboard, and floated gaily down the stream of enjoyment, sinking a smaller craft here and there, but never failing to secure such portions of wreckage as promised comfort to himself.

But such a halcyon state of affairs could hardly be expected to go on for ever. He had now passed the first flush of youth, and a certain cynical sombreness was beginning to tinge his outlook on things in general. He doubted, not so much his wisdom in continuing his unscrupulous career, but his ability to continue any career at all, without immediate reimbursements of some kind.

Chance had favoured him by throwing him at a crucial moment into the company of his former friend Silas Drenchard. From Drenchard himself little could be squeezed out; but at least that parsimonious youth had introduced him to two promising sources of profit—Robert Crumpler and Josian Trehane.

And to Matravers. A third figure, of infinite possibilities. It was of Demetrius that he was thinking when a head rose over the top of the broken wall, and a grumbling voice spoke in his ear :

" Hello ! What are you doing mooning about here ? Nice, cheerful spot, ain't it ? "

" Very suitable to my mood, Sly."

Drenchard came round and joined him.

" Your mood, eh ? I hope it's a pleasanter one than mine."

" I doubt it, my friend. What's wrong with you ? "

" That infernal supper. I can't stomach messes like that."

" Sly, you're indelicate. It was food for the gods."

" Oh, I know you think the girl's a goddess. I'm not in love with her—and so I don't."

" Ah ! That does make a difference, I suppose."

" 'Twas all the fault of the old man's cursed temper—banging into the chap like that."

Jermyn smiled reminiscently. Drenchard frowned.

" And you were as bad," he said. " Why the devil did you act as you did ? "

" Well, to tell you the honest truth," Jermyn replied slowly, " I thought the little episode might be beneficial to our young friend."

" I don't see what it had to do with you," grumbled the younger man.

" H'm ! No ; I suppose you don't. Still—Sly, are you in your stepfather's confidence ? "

" Not to any large extent. Why ? "

Jermyn did not answer at once. Then he fell to prodding at the tiny ferns which had found a foothold in the crevices of the irregular stones. Thus he avoided the other's eyes.

" I was thinking," he began with the lack of lucidity usually observable when the subject approached requires delicate handling. " Your stepfather, now——"

" Well, what of him ? "

" Did you say he was a rich man ? "

" I believe so. He says he isn't. But he does a lot of work, and must get high prices. I ought to be living at ease instead of slaving away in a Government office."

" Right, my boy, right ! So you should. I've often wondered that you haven't the spirit to put out your hand and take what belongs to you."

" Eh ? " said Drenchard, staring.

" Besides these Trehanes, you're his sole kith and kin, aren't you ? "

" I never heard of any other relatives."

" Just so. Bound to be all yours some day."

Drenchard looked gloomy.

" I'm not sure of that," he answered. " Not by law, you know. I've no legal claim on him."

Jermyn smiled deprecatingly.

" Oh, the law, the law ! " he cried. " Damn the law for a cold-hearted monster ! There are other claims than those of the law, aren't there ? "

" What do you mean ? "

" What about the claims of the affections, of the human heart, my boy ? "

Drenchard gave a harsh laugh.

" That's out of the reckoning," he said.

Jermyn regarded him with well-regulated gravity.

" You surprise me, Sly. Surely your stepfather's predilection must be obvious to yourself."

" Predilection for what ? "

" For you, of course. He's remarkably fond of you—in his own way."

" In that case, his way's so devilish close that I'm hanged if I've ever got the least hint of it."

" Ah, you're not observant. Now, I, as an outsider—a disinterested outsider, remember—can see very well how the wind blows."

" There's a devilish blight in it for my affairs. That's all I know."

" Sly, I begin to think that exquisite supper must have affected you, after all. You're so exceedingly despondent this evening."

" You don't expect me to be cheerful, do you, with you always hanging uninvited on to my elbow ? "

Jermyn laughed lightly, dislodged several lumps of moss from the stones of the wall, and looked at his friend.

" Come now, Sly," he said, " you ought not to quarrel with my being here when I'm bending all my intellect to the unselfish task of helping you."

Silas Drenchard sat up and regarded his companion with a little frown.

" Unselfish," he repeated. " Did you say unselfish, Jermy ? "

" I say unselfish, my dear fellow, because Lord knows I've nothing to get out of it. Save what your sense of gratitude may urge you to bestow."

" Ah ! " said Drenchard.

But he was interested, and presently added : " Go on."

" Pax ? " asked Jermyn.

" Oh, if you like ! You can stay as long as I do. Tell me about this plan of yours."

" To be sure. My plan. For your benefit. Remember that."

" Very good. I'm attending."

" And we can't be overheard. That's the great advantage of a discussion out of doors. No eavesdroppers, eh ? because there's no cover for 'em."

" Who the devil should eavesdrop ? " retorted Drenchard irritably. " Besides, does it matter ? "

" H'm ! One can't be too private in affairs of this kind. I'm not sure that I like that hedge opposite. It's a deal too thick. Is there a road there ? "

" What a cautious chap you are ! There's only a lane leading to the mill. In fact, the mill's just outside. You can see the building, can't you ? "

" Thank you. I can. It's not a thoroughfare, then ? "

" No. No one goes past but the mill people, and they wouldn't understand your fine London speech even if they did listen."

" Very good. What made me ask was a fancy I had just now that I saw the undergrowth shaking."

" Rabbits. Or squirrels," said Drenchard. " Get on with your story, do ! "

" I was speaking of your present relations with your step-father."

" Present, past, and future," grumbled the other, " he's always been a close-fisted old miser to me, and he always will be."

Jermyn smiled, patting his friend's shoulder.

" Right, my Silas ! He always will be—during his lifetime. And, as he seems a remarkably vigorous old cock, there's no reason why, in the course of nature, he shouldn't live to be a hundred."

" That's the devil of it ! " muttered the affectionate stepson.

" And you are—how old ? "

" Just turned twenty-five."

Jermyn considered, drumming his fingers on the wall.

" Let's see," he murmured. " The old man must be seventy. Say seventy-three. And we'll give him the full century. That means another twenty-seven years for him. Why, my poor Sly, you'll be a middle-aged man of fifty-two before you begin to enjoy your property."

" I don't see what you're driving at. I don't even know that it ever will be my property."

" Ah ! Now I'll let you into a little secret, my boy. It is going to be your property one day."

Drenchard's eyes gleamed greedily. His voice rose a tone or two.

" How do you know that ? " he asked.

" I heard it from Mr. Crumpler himself this very evening."

" Lord ! " cried Drenchard. " Is that true ? Did the old man really say that ? "

" He did. You're to have everything ; lock, stock and barrel, his elegant phrase was. All except those cursed ivories that he bored me with for one solid half-hour this evening. Oh, and the bust. I heard him promise Miss Trehane that in trust for the nation."

Drenchard sat silent for awhile, staring at the irregular ground, and busily engaged in prising out with his toe a morsel of stone which was embedded in the soil.

" I don't want his damned old busts and carvings," he muttered at length. " It's not them I'm hankering after. He can bury 'em for all I care. They're not worth anything. It's—other things."

" Sly," said Jermyn softly, " did you ever hear your step-father talk of—a treasure in his possession ? A great treasure ; worth a man's life to get hold of."

" Never ! " cried Drenchard ; then he gave a low whistle, and sat staring into the other's bold eyes.

" He bragged of it to-night," said Jermyn, letting his words drop slowly and clearly in the other's ear.

" A treasure ! " repeated Drenchard still in the same awe-struck tones. " Old Silas Crumpler bragging of a treasure ! D'ye think he really meant it ? Did he say what it was ? "

The two heads were close together now, and open cupidity was staring from at least one pair of eyes.

In reply to the question Jermyn nodded and then shook his

head with a faint smile. Drenchard, at the second sign, sank back disappointed.

"Ten to one he was speaking of his own worthless productions," he said, and fell to scowling again.

"No," Jermyn told him with a glibness born in this instance of a genuine conviction, "I don't think so. He boasted, with a damnable pride, that it had already cost a man's life. At least, that's what it came to."

Drenchard sat gnawing his knuckles and staring. Then he asked:

"Didn't he give the least hint of what it was, or its approximate value?"

"Not the least."

"And were you fool enough not to try to find out?"

"There you wrong me! I asked him point-blank. He closed up like an oyster, and I could learn nothing."

"Of course not. You went the wrong way to work. He's as sly as the devil, and, once he thought you'd scented a lay, it would take a smarter chap than even you to get a word out of the old rip. I wish I'd been there!"

"You wouldn't have fared any better," said Jermyn coolly. "Besides, my dear fellow, don't you see how much to your advantage it is not to know anything about the affair?"

"No; hanged if I do. Why?"

"Think! Supposing this incomparable treasure should chance in the near future to change hands, who could suspect you of complicity or unlawful possession, when circumstances proved your ignorance of the treasure's existence?"

"H'm! I see. . . . Yes, you're right, Jermyn. You're smart. I don't like you overmuch, but I'll say that for you. I don't wonder you managed to cook Matravers's goose for him so neatly."

"I'll forgive your odious culinary metaphor for the sake of the compliment," said Jermyn. "Of course I'm right."

"Stop a bit, Jermyn! There's my cousin!"

"I forgot her. Does she know, eh? She got here before we did. A woman can worm a lot out of a man in less than no time."

"True, my Solomon, true. But Miss Trehane was present when your stepfather mentioned the thing, and if you care to take my judgment on so delicate a matter the young lady was as mystified as I was."

" Well, that's satisfactory," Drenchard said, drawing a deep breath. Then an uneasy thought occurred to him, and he went on, " Satisfactory as far as it goes, I mean. What about that fellow, Demetrius ? "

" Sly ! Use your common sense ! Is he likely to be in your stepfather's confidence ? Consider the scene we witnessed this evening, and ask yourself that."

" He might have ferreted it out unknown to the old man."

" Not at all probable," Jermyn said with sharp disapproval. " I'll tell you this, Sly ; Matravers wasn't the suspicious, greedy-of-gain sort of fellow that you are. If Crumpler said he wasn't worth a penny, he'd believe it, and not go prying and poking about to find out if it was true."

Drenchard reddened sullenly.

" If you've such a good opinion of your late friend," he grumbled, " I wonder that you held him fast, and let the old man beat him till he dropped."

" I've told you why I did it—" began the other, and broke off suddenly to lean forward, catching Drenchard by the arm as he did so.

" What is it ? " asked the younger man in a whisper.

" I thought I saw something move over by the hedge," Jermyn whispered back, and slid noiselessly from the wall.

The next instant he was rounding on his companion in a kind of subdued fury.

" You damned fool ! Why did you do that ? " he cried.

Drenchard had flung a lump of stone into the hedge.

Both continued to stare in the same direction for half a minute. There was neither movement nor sound.

" You think there was some one listening," Drenchard said defensively. Then, as Jermyn slowly retraced his steps, " Fiddlesticks ! 'Twas a hare or a squirrel. And if it had been anybody, they have seen you get off the wall, and have scuttled off in any case."

" Not necessarily," remarked Jermyn dryly. " That's where you go wrong. You only reason from the obvious and make no allowance for the extraordinary. There's a wide tree-trunk just there, and possibly the listener was concealed behind it, hearing without seeing."

" Well, go and look for yourself."

" No use now. He'd know he was discovered directly your

stone hit the tree. The bank's high enough for him to crouch under and so slip off. You must take the risk of it, Sly."

Drenchard began to bluster.

"You're devilish unfair, Jermyn! Why is it more my risk than yours? Come to that, why is it anybody's risk? What harm were we doing; just sitting and talking, eh?"

"Eavesdroppers as a class have nasty evil minds," said Jermyn as he reseated himself on the wall. "However, no doubt you've given this particular listener his quietus. I don't think he'll venture back. Still, keep your voice down and don't get excited."

"I'm not excited; only interested. Go on. What good does it do us to know about the treasure only?"

Jermyn looked away thoughtfully. At length he said:

"It's the first step."

"Go on."

The other brought his gaze round with a look of peculiar clarity.

"I don't think I've anything more to say," he remarked, rising from the wall.

Drenchard swore and caught him by the arm.

"You know you don't mean it," he muttered. "You've a deal more in your mind."

"Well," said the other, letting himself be pulled back, "what do you want?"

"I want your—your advice, your—help, Jermy."

"About what?"

"Oh, curse you, the treasure, of course!"

"I've told you all I know."

"Couldn't you find out any more?"

"How?"

"Devil take you, you might help me a little! This is damned important to me. And 'twouldn't be to your disadvantage to be civil. Can't you suggest anything?"

"To find out more?"

"No!" cried Drenchard, squirming on his stony seat, and growing redder in the face every instant. "To—to get the thing," he stammered at last.

"Oh, you want to get the thing, do you?" said Jermyn, looking fixedly at him, and keeping himself remarkably cool. "I see. I understand."

"You—you don't blame me, do you?"

" Certainly not. It's as good as your own property, of course. Where's the harm in a man desiring his own property ? None at all ! "

" That's just the point," cried Drenchard eagerly. " It is my own property, isn't it ? If the man wasn't such an infamous old miser he'd give it to me at once instead of keeping me waiting for his death—the old sinner ! "

" It's a hard case, Sly, but I'm afraid there's no way out of it. You will have to wait till your aged relative dies."

" But I don't want to wait ! " cried the exasperated Drenchard. Jermyn knew to a nicety how much pressure to apply to a raw spot. " I tell you I want it at once. Curse it all, man, can't you see how hard it is to waste all my best years grinding away in a dusty Government office for a miserable pittance got by the favour of a man who hates me ? Am I not a gentleman born, of as good county stock as any ? Oughtn't I to be riding my own horse through my own acres every day of the week ? And am I to wait for my rights until a dried-up old skinflint of a miser chooses to turn up his toes and let me take what's mine ? "

Jermyn reached out a hand and patted his friend's shoulder.

" Bless my soul, Sly, I never guessed you'd such a flow of language," he cried. " Very well reasoned out ! But, my dear fellow, where under heaven is the remedy ? "

Drenchard subsided weakly.

" If you can't find one," he said, " I'd as soon you hadn't told me anything about the cursed affair. The slavery will be ten times worse than ever now."

" I'm afraid it will," was Jermyn's judicial remark. " But, heart up, my dear fellow. The old boy may drop off at any moment."

" That's just what he won't do ! " groaned the other, letting his chin fall dejectedly into his hand. " He's as tough as an oak, and all the wishing in life won't make him die. He'll live as long as he can just to spite me."

" Don't talk like a child, Sly. It would serve your turn better to act like a man."

Drenchard turned up a sulky countenance.

" Why, what the devil would you do in my place ? " he demanded.

" Do ? Set my wits to work, my dear boy, to get what I wanted, provided I wanted it as badly as you seem to do."

" I haven't got wits like yours——"

"So it appears."

"Well; but what would you do? Telling me to use my wits doesn't help me at all!"

"What should I do?" repeated the adviser with a great show of reflection. "Perhaps if my welfare depended to such a very large extent upon the old man's—shall we say—dropping off, I should look about for some simple and easy means of assisting him to—drop off. That's all."

Drenchard went red, then pale. He drew the back of his hand across his mouth and gasped.

"Good God, Jermyn!" he whispered. "You don't mean that I—that I——"

"Hush! Not for a moment. Not for a single instant, you fool. There are other ways. And understand that I'm not suggesting anything. I'm merely imagining myself in your particularly pinching shoes."

"Devil take it, Jermyn, I always knew you were a villain, but I didn't think you were quite so cool a customer as all that."

"Have a care, Sly! A man may call me names once, twice, but not three times. You've reached the limit, my boy. You asked for my opinion. I've given it—candidly. I can't help it if it doesn't coincide with your morals."

"Damn it, I don't pretend to be moral, of course. But——"

"I had a better opinion of you, or I shouldn't have spoken so freely. As a gentleman, you're bound to forget what I've just said."

Drenchard turned his head away. His companion studied him attentively. A few moments' unobserved scrutiny of the irresolute face convinced him that whatever else the young man might forget, those insidious words of his would cling to his memory and become naturalized there.

Presently Drenchard ventured to look at the other.

"Do you really mean," he asked in a hesitating manner, "that that's what you would do?"

"What?" asked Jermyn easily.

"I can't say it. You know. What you suggested."

"My dear Sly, how often am I to tell you that I've suggested nothing. You asked me a certain question, and I answered it frankly. And you make all these words. Perhaps we have talked long enough. I think I'll go in."

Again he rose; again the other pulled him back.

"No; wait a while," Drenchard muttered with dry lips. "There's another thing I want to ask."

"Well?"

"What did you mean about—other ways?"

"Oh, I'll not tell a scrupulous fellow like you. You might be shocked again."

"No; no, I won't," said Drenchard childishly. "I promise you that!"

Had the situation been less delicate, Jermyn would have smiled. Here was more malleable material than ever Matravers had been.

"If you're asking for advice," he answered deliberately, "understand, once for all, that I've none to give. But if you still want to know how I might act in your place——"

"Yes, yes," cried Drenchard, his narrow eyes gleaming, "that's it!"

"I should first of all tap Demetrius."

"Ah!" said the other, starting back.

"I should appeal to his antipathies," Jermyn went on in the impersonal tone of a man stating an hypothesis. "If he's had much of what we witnessed this evening, he must have had a good deal of his finer feelings knocked out of him. Then I should attack him on the sympathetic side; let him feel that he had found a friend, and all that. And when I felt reasonably sure of him I should gently insinuate what I wanted him to do. And, properly managed, one oughtn't to have much difficulty."

"Go on," said Drenchard. He was listening with a fascinated look.

"To what purpose, Sly? 'Tis not my affair, after all."

"No, but, by gemini, it's mine! Go on—I like to hear you talk."

"If he hung back at the first, and he might have retained some of his former morbid characteristics, I should point out to him his exceptional position, the fact that being under the law he had nothing to lose. If he was persistently stubborn I might even bring a little pressure to bear by indicating my readiness to inform the authorities of his existence and whereabouts."

"That's a good point, Jermy!" cried Drenchard, smiting his palm on the wall.

"Excellent!" Jermyn allowed himself to smile at his friend's approval. "And if pressure of another sort, on the side

of physical courage was needed—and he seems as tame as a mouse at present—I should probably contrive that he got an even sharper flogging than he had to-night."

Drenchard looked with a gleam of intelligence, and whistled softly.

"Was that why you let him be beaten just now?"

Jermyn gave one of his airy nods.

"For," he said, "although I didn't know anything about the treasure then, I fancied it might be useful—to you, Sly—to establish a thorough-going hatred of his master."

"Thankye; much obliged. You're a wonderful fellow, Jermy. But what I'm thinking of is this: supposing—supposing anything did happen, and he got caught, wouldn't he denounce us as accomplices, eh?"

"Denounce—us?" repeated Jermyn with a frown.

"Beg pardon; denounce me, I mean. There's that risk in it, you know."

"Pooh! What a chicken-heart you are! There would be no risk at all. Who'd take the word of a half-hanged murderer against that of the deceased's nearest relative?"

Drenchard's face expressed the liveliest relief. He breathed easily again.

"You've another strong point, if you cared to make it," observed Jermyn, after a pause, and with an insidious lapse from the supposititious to the personal.

"Have I?" said Drenchard eagerly.

"There's very little doubt that Matravers is in love with your cousin."

"Is he? I don't see how that helps me."

"You don't? It might be made a strong lever to move his inclinations."

"How?"

"By threatening to expose him to her."

"I see. Yes, that's another good point. I say, the—the thing ought to be easy, Jermy?"

"That's what I said at the first."

"And—and if it did happen, a man needn't know anything about the—the details, need he?"

"Oh, our Demetrius would arrange all that. You wouldn't know anything until it was over."

"And, in that case, he—he couldn't be blamed, could he?"

"There'd be nothing to incriminate you," Jermyn assured

him, still sticking doggedly to the personal aspect of the ugly affair.

"I mean—he needn't blame himself?"

"You'd be a fool if you did. If Demetrius was once set on it, how the devil could you stop him?"

"There's a deal in that," said Drenchard argumentatively.

"I only wish I had your chance, my boy."

His friend flung him a half-appealing, half-frightened glance.

"Oh, but you're going to help, aren't you?" he stammered.

Jermyn stuck his hands into his pockets, and stared over the wall.

"I might, if I saw any good to myself at the bottom of it," he said.

XXI

SERVANT AND MAN

"GOOD girl!" cried Josian aloud, flinging down her pen and pouncing her letter with a will. "Thank the Powers and the little pigs, 'tis done!"

She threw out her arms straight from her shoulders, and stood up, her brilliant eyes agleam with satisfaction and relief.

Truly, the letter was written. It was not a scholarly piece of work. It was penned in a careless hand, marred by a few blots and smears, and contained more than one word of such doubtful orthography that even the writer was aware of something wrong. But the great point was that at last she had written to her father the letter which was to put him on his guard against her cousin Silas, and, incidentally, to ask his directions as to her own future course of action.

She had spoken at some length of her life at the Tower, her powers of description being better than her execution, and had given a clear account of the ways and characteristics of three of the men with whom she was now intimately associated. Of the fourth, Demetrius Jordan, as she knew him, there was not a word. She was merry over her cousin's sulky ways; and wrote frankly of his fine London friend's attentions. She spoke without reserve of her uncle's cantankerous manner and harsh speech. But of Demetrius, the one who was most in her mind as she wrote—throwing her eyes out of window every now and then, to see if he chanced to come into view—there was never a word.

She reported the old sculptor's covert allusions to the reprieve, and confessed, a little shamefacedly, her failure to discover its whereabouts. On the other hand, she pressed the importance of the former fact, which argued that at least it was still in existence. Finally, she assured her father that she would, as far as in her lay, retard the completion of the bust as long as

possible, and begged to remain his dutiful daughter, Josian Trehane.

Having folded the letter and addressed it on the outside, she slipped it into a trinket-box, put the key in her pocket, and, pushing open the window, leant out. The air was cool and fragrant with the scent of rain-drenched grass and flowers. The storm was only a memory. Overhead, light summer clouds swam across a sky just beginning to show the opalescent tints of the sunset. The azure of the midmost heaven was melting on the western horizon into misty green and pale sulphur, but as yet the sun was dazzling in its brilliancy. Sward and bough were glistening with the unevaporated drops of the recent storm. Where these had collected in sundry odd crevices and inequalities of the roof, a puff of wind occasionally sent a little runlet of water dripping to the ground. The air was very still, so that the mellifluent notes of a blackbird seemed to fill the whole space around the musing girl. But once, in a pause of the song, she heard the sound of hurried feet in the lane outside, falling sharp and distinct upon the ground washed free of the deadening layer of dust and leaves that would have smothered the noise of their passage a few hours earlier.

Presently she leaned a little farther out and took a survey of the grounds as well as she could in her circumscribed position. Her room was on the westward side of the house, and commanded, through the intervening trees, an oblique view of the gatehouse. Between her and that venerable pile nothing moved. She rose to her full height and stood considering, swayed by an impulse too light to be a desire, too serious to be a whim. Where the other members of the household were she did not know. She was in her own room, and there was no reason why she should leave it again that night. The family had met for the last meal of the day, and late hours were not kept at the Tower. But the girl was restless this evening. One responsibility was off her mind, truly, by the writing of the letter, but that only gave her greater leisure to remember other things.

Before long her mind was made up, and she was slipping through the silent house into the open air. Quickfooted she ran across the intervening grass, and approaching the gatehouse from the back peered in at the window of the room on her right hand.

This window consisted of long narrow lights in the ecclesiastical style, diamond-paned and heavily mullioned. As little

light was transmitted to the interior, so it was practically impossible to ascertain what was going on within from the outside. Despite the cool fragrance of the evening air, doubly grateful after the sultry day, the window was entirely closed. It appeared, moreover, to be unnaturally darkened in the centre, as though some object had been placed before it. Josian drew back, and blushed a little.

"Perhaps he has gone to bed," she thought. "Mercy me, that would be improper indeed!"

Yet six weeks ago she would have awakened a male servant with her own hand at his door, and have given the proprieties no thought at all.

But Demetrius was not sleeping, nor had he even taken his way across to the adjoining tower, where he had his night quarters. This fact Josian Trehane presently ascertained for herself. For, her fancy rapidly assuming the solidity of a purpose with the first check to her plan, she ventured to put the question to the touch by advancing lightly into the paved yard that lay between the two portions of the gatehouse. Treading softly lest her footfall should echo in the vaulted roof overhead, she crept up to the doorway of the right-hand room, and found herself looking slantwise into the shadowy apartment. The door on the opposite side being tightly shut, and the great doors in front of her bolted and barred, there still remained a doubt as to the occupant's availability; which doubt she must needs solve by advancing into the open doorway itself.

He was sitting in the window-seat, blocking out the light with his drooping body, his head bent forward, his fingers twining with a curious restless movement round a small bottle of green glass. He had exchanged his torn and sodden shirt for a fresh garment, and his outer coat hung across a chair. On the table was some broken food, but the accessories had not been used. So absorbed was he in his meditations and in the contemplation of the bottle between his fingers that the girl had time to notice these details before he had intuition of her presence.

When he realized it he hastily thrust the bottle away and stood up before her.

"Can I do anything for you, miss?"

His manner was quiet, though his speech came a trifle hurriedly. Josian sank into a chair by the table. The last of the daylight fell upon her fair face as, leaning her elbows on the board, she looked rather sorrowfully at him, and said:

" Oh, Demetrius, Demetrius, can you do nothing for yourself ? " In the dim light she saw the colour rise to his forehead. " Why do you allow Mr. Crumpler to use you so ? " Josian asked with a touch of the resentment that should have come from the young man himself. " Have you no pride—no shame ? "

" No pride, miss. Too much shame."

" But why, oh, why, do you submit so easily ? Is it the way to win back whatever self-respect you may have lost, by letting an overbearing old man treat you like a misbehaving boy ? "

" Mr. Crumpler is my master, Miss Trehane. He has a right to do what he pleases."

Josian struck her foot upon the floor.

" Oh, yes," she cried, " he has every right if you choose to give it him ! "

" Perhaps I have given it to him already."

Josian looked fixedly at him. He was still standing with his back to the light, and in the dimness his face looked grey and cold.

" How ? And when ? " she asked.

" Before I came here."

" I don't understand ! How did you come here ? "

" I can't tell you that."

" How provoking you are ! "

" I'm sorry, Miss Trehane. Perhaps you had better go away and leave me alone. I—I think I would prefer it."

Josian started up, an angry spot on either cheek. She had come out of interest and pity, and this was how he treated her.

" You're very uncivil ! " she said, looking at him across the table. " Your ' perhaps ' and ' perhaps,' and telling me to go away ! I won't go until I choose ! I'll make you answer my questions."

He made no reply to that, but, putting out his hand, leant on the window-seat. And she saw that he was trembling. She remembered then that he must still be aching from the old man's blows, though no gesture or tone of impatience had given token of the fact.

" You puzzle me," she said in a gentler tone.

" I puzzle myself," he returned with a hint of bitterness.

" You seem so weak, and then again you seem so strong. Tell me, did Mr. Crumpler really stamp those letters on you ? "

" Yes."

The girl, who had never known a finger ache, shuddered.

" To make you his servant for ever ? "

" Yes."

" Why, you might as well be a slave or a convict ! Why don't you run away."

" I don't wish to."

" Not wish to ? After to-night ? Good Lord ! "

" Miss Trehane, did you come here to taunt me with that ? "

" To taunt you ? A thousand times, no ! Why won't you leave such a hard master, Demetrius ? You can't possibly love such a man."

" It is true," Demetrius answered slowly, " that Mr. Crumpler is a hard master. But I should not better my position by leaving him."

" He pays you good wages, I suppose," said Josian with a contemptuous lip. " And you put up with the blows and the scoldings for the sake of a few extra shillings ! I didn't think young men had so little spirit."

" You wrong me, Miss Trehane ! Before God, you wrong me cruelly ! If you must know the truth, Mr. Crumpler pays me nothing at all."

Josian stared at him in silent amazement for an instant. Then she moved round the table and approached him.

" Why, that only makes it all the more astonishing ! "

Demetrius, who was already regretting his impulsive confidence, drew away at her advance.

" I suppose it does," he admitted reluctantly. " But, for God's sake, Miss Trehane, ask me nothing further ! It is my own unhappy affair. Why should it be anything to you ? "

Why, indeed ? Josian had not asked herself that question. Nor did she stay to find the answer now. She only knew that his every word stirred her to new wonderment ; that, downtrodden and degraded as he was, he interested her more than any man whom she had yet seen, that in spite of his reticence, his discouragement of her advance, she could no more take real offence at his manner than believe that mere indifference lay behind it.

When she spoke it was in a gentler way that hurt him infinitely more than her light words and mocking gibes. Hurt him because his tormented soul realized a little more fully all the sweetness of the possibility from which the shadow of his past must, it seemed, shut him out for ever.

How dared he, whose physical nearness to her was an insult,

even as hers to him was an unspoken reproach, draw to himself even the thought of that possibility of dearness on either side which might have arisen, as his bitterness suggested, in another world? How could he dare to take into his heart, all wounded and perplexed as it was, the dearness of this radiant girl herself? And, as he asked the question in his own mind, he realized that the moment of daring had passed unrecognized, that he had so dared, and that from henceforth he must bear the additional burden of a hopeless love for Josian Trehane.

The immediate physical effect of this revelation was to send him still farther away from her, moving step by step backward until he had reached the dusky corner by the fireplace. Here he stood among the shadows, his patch of white hair catching the faint light from the window. Josian, meanwhile, was speaking earnestly.

"Demetrius," she said, "you're in trouble about something, but isn't it rather foolish to hide yourself away from the world and brood over things like this? Mr. Crumpler surely could not keep you here if you wished to go."

"Perhaps not," he answered from the shadows; "but I have nowhere else to go."

"No friends?"

"My only friend is Barjona Furmedge, the tranter. A good man, but I don't think he could help me."

"Of course not. But you must have a home somewhere."

"I don't remember it."

"Don't you know anything about your past?"

"Only what I have been told."

"I only heard about it the other day. How odd it must be! Why, my mind runs back to the time when I was quite a small child! And you remember nothing?"

"Nothing."

"It must be very interesting," said the girl. "Like being born again when you're grown up, and finding out things for the first time. Don't you long to find out things about yourself?"

"Sometimes I do; sometimes I don't."

"I couldn't rest until I knew everything!" declared Josian with conviction. Then she looked thoughtfully at him. "Demetrius," she said, "I'd like to help you. I think my father might be able to do something. He's a great man in London, one of the Government officials. He has to know all that's going on in the country, even down to the horrid business of hangings

and reprieves, and—and—oh, many other things." Josian's knowledge of her father's status and duties was vague to a degree. "And such work must bring him into contact with very many people. Some of them might know your name or family——"

"For God's sake," Demetrius interrupted, his voice shaking with painful emotion, "leave me alone! I want no help, no friends! In pity go away and forget that you ever saw me! That is the only kindness you can ever show to me. Let me remain as I am, alone, despised, forgotten, out of men's minds as they have passed out of mine!"

He ended with a gasping breath, and, turning quickly in his dark corner, leant against the chimney jamb and covered his face. So he remained for a while, and the silence in the room was broken only by the sound of his heavy breathing.

At length Josian moved, and at that he raised his head. Still he did not speak, and so the task fell to her.

"I am sorry," was all she said, but whether her regret was for his distress or for her apparent inability to ameliorate the hardship of his position, she could not have told. She knew only that sudden and uncontrollable emotion in one who was usually so reticent and self-restrained had shocked and startled her. She knew only that she was in the presence of something awesome and fascinating that had never touched her life before.

Then to her, also, came a revelation. It was less than his, but not without a significance of its own.

For now Demetrius the Servant had become Demetrius the Man.

XXII

THE PROVING OF THE SERVANT

SHE turned and left him without another word.

With her going a sudden numbness of despair descended upon him. He moved blindly back to his old position in the window-seat, fell into his former attitude and so remained, unthinking and unfeeling, since thought and emotion had both become so intense as to stultify themselves.

The day, so empty of actual activities, had been rife with experiences which had engendered both mental and physical distress of no ordinary kind. A man of a more robust calibre might well have sunk beneath the strain, and Demetrius, whose spirits were normally tuned to so low a key, who, in his highest mood merely attained to a dead level of silent endurance, had no reserve of cheerful fortitude to fall back upon now.

She was gone. And, though her presence had scorched his soul and sent him into the nethermost abyss of a man's bitter and hopeless regret, he was the worse for his loneliness.

Why not end it for once and all? End the doubt and misery and fearfulness of what the future might bring? Before him, as behind him, hung a black cloud of horror, and since the coming of the storm he understood better the meaning of the one, and the prophetic significance of the other.

He had never doubted the plain facts concerning himself that he had learned from others. And now, where remembrance failed, imagination stepped in.

In truth, it seemed that imagination had borrowed some subtle strength from its dead ally, so vivid was the operation of his mind when once he allowed it to dwell upon the possibility of again enduring the experience that had stricken his memory from its seat, and blanched his hair before its time.

Should he end it now? The temptation had come upon him earlier in the evening, before he had raised his eyes in the dusky room, and learnt his own secret from her half-mocking, half-

tender face. And if then, dumbly and blindly, he had writhed before her knowledge of his humiliation, how much greater now was that double sense of shame both for what he might once have been, and for what he had become. His love for her, self-revealed and self-consuming, was as a flame of fire to light with a merciless radiance all the waste and ugly places of his soul. Yet, self-condemned, and with scarcely a hope that he was innocent of the hideous crime for which he had suffered, he bare himself to the fierceness of the light, and warmed his starving heart in the glow, with a deep conviction that it was at once his greatest happiness and his profoundest misery.

To end it ? Why not ? Could any living creature slip so easily out of life as he, and be so little missed when he was gone ? Good God, was there another man on earth such as he, without friends, or home, or kinship—or even the blessed memory that such things had been ?

He moved at last and thrust his hand inside his shirt, seeking the little bottle of laudanum which Mrs. Summerhayes had given him for his last extremity. His thought ran back to the woman ; and a great dread crept into his mind that, should he delay to use her gift, she might one day ask for it back again, and leave him naked to the worst that might befall. He sought for the bottle eagerly, but failed to find it in its accustomed place. The cord which secured it to his neck dangled loose against his breast. Then he remembered. At Josian's coming he had thrust it into a pocket of his waistcoat.

He had forgotten which, and in his search his fingers closed mechanically upon a thick square packet, and hung there, arrested. In that moment, the moral sense reasserted itself against the physical exhaustion and mental stress that had favoured the commission of the deed. His mind grew clearer. He began to readjust proportions into a truer form.

The thing which had stayed his hand was a small squat copy of the Bible that Barjona Furmedge had pressed upon him that day at parting. He recalled the homely figure of the tranter standing in the rain-swept roadway, moistening his broad thumb on his underlip and turning over the pages at the bottom as he sought for some special passage. Taking it out now, Demetrius found that the volume fell open in his hand. Barjona had folded down a certain page.

The young man carried the book to the door, and set back the page in its place. At once his eye fell upon a pencil mark, scored

beneath a text often chosen by the tranter for his itinerant preaching. Demetrius held up the book and read :

" The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

His hand dropped to his side ; his head fell on his breast. He closed his eyes, and stood so for a full minute, thinking. Then, with a swift step, he turned again to the obscurity of the room behind him. He reached the chair which Josian had left by the table, and, dropping into it, flung his arms across the deal board and buried his face in them. Passion moved him, but of no earthly sort, and though the dear presence of the girl still lingered warmly around his inert form it was as an influence to irradiate rather than to allure. Despair, not lessened in its essence, had become shot through with that half-divine ray which makes even human misery endurable.

" O my God," he breathed, " if I am indeed guilty of this awful crime, if my hands have truly done this monstrous deed, accept my broken heart as sacrifice, and let these bitter stripes of pain be an atonement for my sin. I will endure all things ; I will put the temptation from me—I will seek no way of escape unless my life is forfeit indeed. Then, and then only, shall the hand which may have robbed another of his life end my own. . . . And in mercy pardon me because in the weakness of my nature I cannot face the ordeal of man's justice for the second time."

The pitiful prayer was barely ended when a touch fell lightly on his shoulder. He raised his damp and quivering face and found Lawrence Jermyn standing over him.

" H'm ! " ejaculated the visitor. " Sorry if I disturbed you. Asleep, eh ? "

Demetrius, thrusting Barjona's book back into his pocket, sat up and grappled fiercely for his self-control. It was a few seconds before he could trust himself to speak.

Meanwhile, Jermyn stood looking down upon him in the half-light. His own face was coolly quizzical, and a little amused. Then Demetrius finished wiping his forehead and cheek with his shirt sleeve, controlled his quivering muscles as well as he could, and put almost the same question to Jermyn as he had addressed to Josian an hour earlier.

" Did you want me, sir ? "

Jermyn, unconsciously imitative, did much as the girl had

done. He sat down on the edge of the table, and looked at Demetrius for a while in silence. Presently he took out a handkerchief and flicked some invisible dust from his knee. For the moment, drawn backward against his will, his mind had been busy with the remembrance of a day, less than a year ago, when he had faced this present companion of his in similar circumstances—alone with him, and in the same dusky evening light.

Demetrius, with some unexplained distaste for the near presence of the man, rose and moved away, carrying the chair with him and setting it in a far corner, lest Jermyn's undesired person should violate what had supported Josian Trehane's delicate form.

"My good fellow," drawled the visitor, "can't you get a light? It's devilish dark in this den of yours."

Demetrius busied himself with lighting a short length of candle. The sculptor, to whose artistic interests it was to nourish the body of his servant, was parsimonious towards his needs in all other respects. The light, when obtained—and twice Demetrius's shaking fingers let the sulphur match go out—was but a poor thin flame, which Jermyn regarded with contempt.

"Sit down," he said abruptly, and waited while the other brought forward a low stool, which served the visitor's purpose well, since it placed Demetrius's face on a level with the light, while his own was elevated considerably above it. "How do you feel?" he asked, after an amused scrutiny of the features before him.

"I am very well. Do you wish me to do anything for you, sir?"

"Oh, yes," Jermyn responded easily, "a lot of things. You don't bring me half enough water of a morning. I like a full bucket."

"I'll remember, sir."

"And I'm tired of your stewed dishes. Give us a roast to-morrow."

"If Mr. Crumpler is willing."

"Hang Mr. Crumpler! Where's the use of trying to please an old curmudgeon like that? I should have thought you'd found that out long ago."

Demetrius said nothing.

Jermyn rapped the table.

"Not going to sleep again, are you?"

"No. And I was not asleep when you came in."

" No ? Only resting ? "

" Only resting," Demetrius repeated. And, in truth, his passionate prayer, in its absolute self-surrender, at the heart of it had had a great calm.

" H'm ! Well, I should think you needed it after the bout the old man gave you," Jermyn observed with a smile. " I quite gave you up for gone myself. Feel rather sore, eh ? "

Demetrius's eyes swam up with a flash of anger.

" Is it just or generous of you to taunt me, sir ? " he asked.

" I've no wish to be taken for a generous man. I help myself, not others, as a rule."

" And I am to think, then, that you helped yourself at my expense ? " Demetrius asked with bitter resentment. " I find it hard to see how ! "

" Think what you please, my good fellow. You surely don't expect a gentleman to explain a momentary whim to you."

" Perhaps not. But neither should I have expected to suffer for a gentleman's whim."

" Ah, you don't know me yet," said Jermyn, tossing one leg over the other and balancing himself delicately upon his perch. " How could you ? I'm a man who takes knowing, and you met me only the other week."

Demetrius had nothing to say. He lowered his head again and the candle rays fell upon his snowy patch of hair. Jermyn laughed softly, and looked at it with interest.

" Come, come," he said in a tone of pleasant raillery, " you're upset at the part you think I took in your punishment——"

" That's not a fair way to put it ! "

" Well, well, as you please ! Say that I did help the old man to belabour you, haven't you asked yourself whether I may not have had a good reason for it ? "

" No, I've not ! I only know——"

" Nothing about it ! After all, I was as great a sufferer as you were. I got a shocking bad supper instead of a devilish good one. Miss Trehane is a goddess from Olympus : but she can't cook."

Demetrius, unprepared for this sudden introduction of Josian's name, was betrayed into giving the slight sign for which Jermyn had been on the watch. His eyes came up and went down quickly again. His lips were compressed more tightly than before.

" She told me she was sorry for you," Jermyn went on.

His manner implied that Josian had dropped out her pity for Demetrius amid a score of airy intimacies with himself. "Said she wondered any lad of spirit would put up with it."

Demetrius knew instinctively that the speaker was lying—knew it none the less because Jermyn had chanced upon a variant of the girl's initial sentiment as expressed to himself. Therefore, the suggestion of her half-contemptuous compassion being flung to him through the medium of his present companion failed to move him as Jermyn had intended to do.

"The remark," continued that gentleman, "set me thinking. Why the devil do you put up with it, Demetrius?"

He leaned forward as he spoke and touched the young man's shoulder. But he had no answer to his question.

"Mr. Crumpler has his fingers round your throat, I know," said Jermyn in a low voice; "nice skinny fingers they are too; fit for squeezing. But you might get yours round his, if you tried."

"I don't know what you mean," said Demetrius, drawing back, and speaking with perfect sincerity.

"Did I hurt you, my poor fellow?" cried the other, at once removing his hand. "I forgot how tender your shoulder must be! Are you much bruised? I've an excellent emollient in my case indoors. Shall I fetch it? No? You're a proud lad, I see! I like you all the better for that, and I'll be damned if I don't help you out of this unbearable position of yours!"

"I am not seeking any change," Demetrius told him, meeting his effusions with a cold reserve.

"Wait a bit, my lad. Let's talk." Jermyn settled himself afresh upon the table, and took his face back into the shadows again. "When I said that about your getting your fingers round the old man's throat, I was only using hyperbole, as the students say."

"So I understood, Mr. Jermyn, but——"

"Bless your innocence, of course you did! What else should I mean?"

"Nothing else."

Jermyn laughed.

"What were you going to say just now?"

"Only this: that I don't wish to discuss my master with anyone."

"Don't you? That's odd! Most men like to ventilate a grievance."

" I have complained of none."

" That's no guarantee that you don't feel one."

" If I did there would be no sense in murmuring about it to you."

" Now you're ungenerous. Your wrongs make you hard. Haven't I just said that I want to help you ? "

Demetrius looked up, taking quiet measure of the man. Experience being non-existent, he had only his instincts to fall back upon, and every one that he possessed cried out dislike and distrust of this man. He thought for a moment or two before giving the response for which his companion was plainly waiting. And after he had thought, he could find nothing better to say than :

" Why should you wish to help me ? We are strangers, are we not ? "

" Oh, perfect strangers ! But why should that cold fact hinder my interest in you, my sympathy for the hardship of your lot ? It might, some men : that I allow. Thank Heaven, I'm not one of those ! No, my sentiment is pure and disinterested —the outcome of a genuine regard for you, my poor fellow."

Had not Demetrius been persuaded that the other was lying, the words would have given him a bitter stab of pain. As it was, they affected him not at all. He pulled himself together, and looked up sharply.

" What do you want ? " he asked.

Again Jermyn laughed softly. He began in a mechanical way to shift the plates and dishes on the table. As he did so his left hand came now and then into the circle of light thrown by the candle, and on one occasion, his hand being outstretched, he exposed a narrow white scar that ran across his wrist. Presently, having entirely readjusted the supper things, he surveyed the new arrangement with critical satisfaction, and said :

" What a suspicious chap you are, Demetrius ! Why do you think I want anything ? "

" Because it doesn't seem likely that a gentleman like you would waste so many good words on his host's serving-man unless he had some object at the back of it all."

" H'm ! You're a shrewd fellow," Jermyn said with a frown. " Perhaps you know more than you pretend. It's useful sometimes to lose your memory," he added, sneering a little. " Perhaps you've been laughing in your sleeve at us, and roasting us all finely, eh ? "

His hand shot out and grasped Demetrius roughly by the shoulder, and his face, dark with sudden suspicion, came close to the younger man's. For a moment they looked so into one another's eyes, and as he gazed something stirred feebly in the darkened recesses of Demetrius's mind. But it was gone again even before he had realized its nature—much less grasped the fact for which it stood. He tortured his mind in the effort to recall at least the mere sensation, found the usual blank, and grew momentarily physically faint with the strenuousness of the attempt.

When Demetrius had recovered himself Jermyn had withdrawn both his hand and his face, and was looking over the table a trifle anxiously.

"Got it?" he inquired.

"No. It's gone again. It always goes before I understand it properly. . . . What were you saying?"

"No matter! I've had my answer, unless you're a finer actor than there's any reason to suspect you of being. No, I'm satisfied. Let's go back to your affairs."

"I don't want to discuss them."

"Why do you stay here to be mauled about by that old sinner?" Jermyn asked, unheeding the disclaimer.

"Because it is my place."

"He pays you no wages, so his stepson tells me."

"No. And I don't need any."

"Pooh! that's nonsense—must be. Every man loves money. And Crumpler's a rich old boy. You know that, don't you?"

"I know nothing of it," Demetrius answered coldly.

"Nonsense again! You can't have lived here so many weeks without seeing things. Do you know where he keeps his money—and other valuables?"

Demetrius shook his head. His mouth, usually soft and sweet enough, was growing firm. Despite the aching and half-numbed condition of his body, his brain was singularly clear, probably because the hint of danger subtly suggested by his companion's presence had shaken him out of himself, rendering him less self-centred than usual.

"I don't know anything of Mr. Crumpler's affairs," he said. "If I did, it would not be my place to talk of them to outsiders."

"Come, come, none of that sly cant with me!"

"It's not cant. I mean it. Mr. Crumpler is a hard master

but he trusts me, and I'd not be the one to betray his confidence."

"All very fine and proper! But suppose you drop heroics, my Demetrius, and get down to plain facts. Your master's a rich man; you're a devilish poor one. You know where he keeps his treasures. Why don't you help yourself?"

Demetrius sprang up. The stool fell down with a clatter. Jermyn, at the same moment, slid from the table.

"What?" Demetrius cried. "Rob my master—the man who trusts me?"

"The man who beats and insults you, my friend!"

"I'd rob no man alive! How dare you come here and suggest such a thing to me?"

"Steady, steady," cried Jermyn softly. "Don't get into a rage. After all, it's rather late in the day for you to be scrupulous, isn't it?"

Demetrius was flaming. He leaned on the table and thrust his passion-stricken face close to Jermyn's.

"Mr. Crumpler shall know what sort of a man you are!" he cried. "I've always distrusted you. Now I know what you're doing here. You've come to rob my master!"

Jermyn raised his hand. He was cool and composed.

"Have a care!" he said. "You cursed young firebrand, don't you know that I can ruin you?"

The words fell like ice upon the flame of the other's anger. He drew back at once. Jermyn went on:

"I told you this morning that I might find out things. Well, I have discovered a few interesting facts about you; facts of public interest, my young friend. Did you ever hear of a man called Prothero?"

Over Demetrius's face there came once more the expression of painful concentrated thought which marked his several efforts to snatch some memory out of the past, to be succeeded, as always, by the look of resigned despair that signalized another failure. He gave his old answer in a low tone:

"I can't remember."

"That's the man you murdered," Jermyn said quietly. "And, if you've forgotten, others haven't. There are one or two who would be surprised to learn that you cheated the gallows after all, and pleased enough to find out where you are hiding too."

Demetrius stood, white-lipped and breathing deeply. His

hands had dropped to his sides, and he gazed dimly at the ground. His mind reasoned dully. Was the end to come in this ignoble way? True, he still had the poison bottle. But was his hand to be forced by such a man as this? He heard that man speaking again.

"So now you see we'd better not have any more nonsense about carrying tales to Mr. Crumpler, for it's a game two can play at, my friend. You seem a bit upset. Listen for a moment more, and then I've done. Are you attending?"

Demetrius's dry lips moved soundlessly.

"Very well. Now, I'm not such a fool as to insist upon an answer at once. You can have a week to get used to the idea in, and to make your plans. You've the run of the house, and you're in the old man's confidence. If you don't know where the things are, a week's long enough for you to find out in. In any case, my own affairs won't permit of my allowing you any longer. So you look alive, my boy, or else you know what to expect. Oh, you won't speak, won't you? Very well, then. I've said enough, I think, for the present. You'd better say your prayers and get to bed, and if you wake up in the dark you'll have plenty to think about! Good night to you, my friend!"

"You're a scoundrel!" whispered Demetrius between his teeth as he watched him go.

Jermyn paused at the threshold.

"I wonder what Prothero would say of you," he observed pleasantly, "if he could come to life again!"

XIII

THE MONKS' GARTH

OUTSIDE, behind the gatehouse, Silas Drenchard was waiting for him. The two walked a little way in silence. Then the younger man spoke, gaining a poor sort of courage from the darkness.

"Has he consented?" he asked jerkily, drawing nearer to his companion as he put the question.

"Not yet. I didn't expect him to at once. But I think he will."

"Come, that's something!" Drenchard drew his shoulders together with a shiver. "What did he say?"

"Say? Flared up in quite the old Matravers style. Gad, if I didn't think the gallows would have choked all the fire out of him! But I showed my cards quite plainly, and then left him to consider what a losing game his is."

Drenchard moved on a few yards in silence.

"How long will he be making up his mind, d'ye think?" he asked.

"I've given him a week."

Drenchard caught his breath.

"That's a damned long time to wait."

"Pooh! A mere flea-bite reckoned against the normal course of things."

"I didn't mean that. But to have the thing hanging in the air for so long will be cursedly unpleasant."

"To be hanging in the air yourself would be more so," Jermyn observed. "If you're in such a devil of a hurry, you'd better do the job all alone."

"Damnation, don't talk like that!" Drenchard cried in extreme irritation. "You know I can't stand it. I don't want to know anything about it! You and Matravers can manage it in your own way. Tell me when it's over. I—I think I'll go away."

" No, you won't, Sly. I may want you."

Drenchard shuddered away from his companion. In his excitement his voice rose shrilly in the quiet air.

" I'll have nothing to do with it, I tell you ! " he cried. " I should only make a mess of it. You're a deal cleverer than I am : you and your Matravers must manage everything."

" I see. I'm to do the planning. Matravers is to take the risk. You're to get the profit. That's your notion, eh ? "

" No, no. What a hard fellow you are ! I never said you weren't to get your share."

" I should hope not ! You'd be a bigger fool than I take you for if you did."

" We'll settle that later," Drenchard amended hurriedly. " Time enough. But, I say, Jermy, can't I go away until it's over ? "

" No, you can't. So say no more. What the devil are you afraid of ? "

" Nothing, of course. But——"

" Well ? "

The two had come to a halt in the centre of the Garth, for they had moved forward at random. Clear of the trees, each could see the other's face palely in the dimness. When silence fell between them for the moment, the space was filled by the faint sound of the leaves whispering over the Tower of the Winds to their left.

" I'm not afraid," Drenchard repeated stoutly. " I'm your man for anything. But to have that fellow standing behind your chair at dinner, and to know that he's as good as pledged to—well, 'tis enough to turn anyone's stomach."

Jermyn laughed.

" If that's your trouble," he said, " you can make your mind easy. Matravers hasn't pledged himself as yet even to the robbery ; which is all I've broached to him so far."

Drenchard started.

" What ? You haven't told him more than that ? "

" Not yet. It's enough for him to know at present."

The other was silent, staring on the ground. Presently he looked up.

" Perhaps," he stammered, going red and white by turns, " it would be far enough to go altogether. You see——"

" No, I don't," Jermyn struck in quickly. " There's to be no weak bungling if you want my help in the affair. Matravers is

too good a chance to miss. You don't get a fully-fledged murderer—and he's as good as that—to come at your beck and call every day. 'Twould be throwing away a good gift of Providence not to use him. But that's no real argument, of course. If you want a reason, here's one. Supposing we tell Matravers merely to rob the old man, how can we be sure that he won't keep back a good part of the spoil? And again, how do we know that the wealth is actually concealed in the house? If it's not, if it's in banks and securities, all the robbing in the world won't put it into your pocket until the old man's dead. D'ye see that?"

"Yes. I see that," Drenchard muttered uneasily.

"And again, I don't want to appear in the public eye by denouncing Matravers over the Prothero business. It's the weakness of my position, although, of course, he doesn't know it. And, once this affair's over, we must, for our own sakes, stop his mouth somehow."

"You said that people wouldn't listen to him," objected Drenchard sullenly.

"They might, if only robbery were in question," was the dry response. "If they know you half as well as I do, it's highly probable that they would believe it. But it needs courage for——"

"Be silent!" Drenchard's breath hissed between his teeth as he spoke.

"Very well. Once Matravers has acted as your cat's-paw, he's fairly incriminated. You can accuse him at once."

"Not you?" asked Drenchard, frowning

"My good Sly, I've already indicated that I have my own reasons for not appearing in the affair at all."

"As you will! But, see here, how would it be if he did the robbery? We must trust to his honour to hand up the stuff——"

"If it's in the house!"

"Assume that it is. And then let me denounce him as Demetrius Jordan who ought to have been hanged and wasn't. How would that do, eh?"

"Execrably badly, my fool of a Sly! Would you denounce him before or after he accused you?"

"Before, of course."

"Then, when he did so accuse you, your impulsive haste would lie open to the very colourable suspicion that you had rushed to get your blow in first."

" Afterwards, then."

" Unnecessary ! He'd then presumably be under the law, with the same penalty, for the robbery."

Drenchard grumbled.

" You seem certain he'd be taken."

" He's the first man your stepfather would suspect.

" I suppose so. See here, Jermyn, you seem to have thought it all out like a lawyer."

Jermyn smiled in the darkness.

" I read for the Bar in my young days," he said. " And now, take my word for it, my boy, the way I've indicated is the only way to make you the rich man you ought to be within the year. Of course, if you've a moral against it, there's time to cry off even now."

" Don't go so fast." Drenchard was breathing hard. " I never said I was against it. I—I don't pretend to be moral and all that. Only I don't want to hear particulars, mind. You and Matravers can settle all those between you. And I'll have no hand in it—mind that too ! "

Jermyn drew his friend's arm within his own and pressed it approvingly. The darkness concealed his sneering lips.

" Spoken like my own Sly ! " was his ambiguous comment. " You shall have neither lot nor parcel in it till it's all over. Hulloa, you're as nervous as a cat ! What's the matter now ? "

Drenchard had started violently. He raised his hand and pointed towards the gateway. A small light was slowly moving across the darkness.

" Pooh, you fool ! " Jermyn laughed. " That's only our friend Demetrius going to bed."

XXIV

ROMANCE

ON th following morning Josian took her lettei in her hand and walked down to the village.

It was not her habit to remain for long under a cloud of depression. This was as much a matter of experience as of temperament. Very little of importance had touched her life hitherto. Such trivial worries as she had known had either evaporated or naturally been outlived. Her instinct was towards joyousness, and, although in her heart there still lurked an idle commiseration for the man whose life, as she supposed, had paid the forfeit of her father's carelessness, he had soon lost all the elements of a personality.

True enough, she had been strangely stirred by the incidents in the gatehouse of the preceding evening. And the morning light found her unusually grave and thoughtful. But much of the influence of that strange scene had dissipated. She was no longer swayed by Demetrius's impassioned entreaty to be left alone. She brought a girlish common sense to the situation, and decided, after a little deliberation, that she understood his business far better than he did himself.

As a result, she opened her letter to her father, and added a ew lines :

" You were wrong about my uncle keeping no servant. He has one, a young man of the better sort, whom he uses very ill, and who is not happy here. He is in trouble of some kind, but will never speak much of himself. This is, perhaps, because he has lost his memory, which my uncle takes a cruel advantage of, misusing him in a very distressing way. Could you not do something for this young man ? Please tell me what I ought to do."

After this, she felt relieved of a certain responsibility—since

there was none other willing to help Demetrius, and he apparently was incapable of helping himself. Her mind recovered its elasticity and her spirits rose. Even the self-consciousness engendered by her act was not an unpleasant thing, though she was pleased enough that she saw nothing of the young man himself between her hour of rising and her departure for the village.

His absence called for no special comment, since he usually kept out of sight during the earlier part of the day. Therefore she remained in ignorance of the fact that he was lying fevered and incapable in his room at the gatehouse, and so passed lightheartedly on her errand within a stone's throw of him. Jermyn, who had had to draw his own bucketful of water that morning, could have enlightened her, or Drenchard—who had had a weakly stormy scene with his stepfather for gastronomic reasons —might have done so. But both of these chose to ignore Demetrius as much as possible.

Jermyn was quick to press his attendance on the girl. She laughingly shook him off, and slipped away unobserved.

The morning was pleasantly cool and fresh after the storm. Masses of white and grey clouds drifted before a south-west breeze, casting their shadows across the half-reaped fields. Here and there harvesters were at work, but for the most part the long road, secluded by its high hedges of blackberry and thorn, was solitary enough. The larks and the butterflies went with the girl, and an enormous pink sow, turned loose like a cow or horse, came to the hedgerow to peer at her. A drove of cattle went by, and a waggon laden with corn for the mill passed her at the entrance to the village. But of ordinary pedestrians like herself there were none.

She idled pleasantly on her way, a tall slender figure of a maid, plainly garbed, yet needing no array of fine clothes to bespeak her quality. Her firm carriage, her regular footfall, her bright, assured glance, neither diffident nor overbold, were sufficient warrant for the gentle blood and breeding that were hers. And, in truth, the defects of her upbringing held this advantage for one of her native grace and charm—that, while unconscious of her own value, she was careless of the opinions of others. Neither praise nor blame to any appreciable extent had been hers, neither flattery nor disparagement, neither the rule of the drawing-room nor the indulgences of family life. As a result, she was as free from the constraint which a more regular educa-

tion would have imposed as from the lack of self-control which is apt to follow upon an injudicious humouring in youthful life.

The village street lay before her warmed with sunshine and washed clean by yesterday's torrential rains. The little brooks had returned to their natural bounds, and once more the clear air was pleasantly filled with quiet murmurings. Josian inquired the way to Furmedge's cottage, left the letter with him for conveyance to Dorchester on the following day, and strolled back to the main street. Then she remembered a lack of needles and thread, and turned into Podger's shop to make the purchase.

As she entered the place a woman was leaving it.

Josian threw one of her bright, appraising glances at her, but learned little, beyond gaining an impression that she was a person of the better sort. The woman was wearing a deep bonnet, and, despite the season, a large silk shawl, so that face and figure were equally concealed.

The regard was mutual; Josian was aware of that. But herein was nothing of itself to move either interest or curiosity. Moreover, at that moment she had been thinking of Demetrius, concerning whose welfare the tranter had inquired. Josian, unaware of the degree of intimacy, had answered somewhat wide of the mark, and had then allowed her mind to dwell persistently on the young man himself.

She carried Demetrius, in a figurative sense, into the shop with her, put him on one side while she made her purchases, and picked him up again when she had packed her parcel into the satchel hanging from her wrist. But the woman she left, physically and metaphorically, on the doorstep.

It was, therefore, with considerable surprise, not unmixed with a nascent curiosity, that she found the lady waiting for her when she left the shop.

The attitude of the stranger was unmistakable. As Josian stepped down on to the causeway, the other woman made a movement forward. Josian paused, her head poised inquiringly.

"Miss Trehane, I believe?" the other said.

"My name is Trehane," said the girl, wondering.

"I thought so. Young ladies are scarce in Wool village. You are staying at the Abbey?'

"At Mr. Crumpler's house—yes."

"Will you walk a few yards with me, Miss Trehane? I have something of importance to say to you."

"That's odd," said Josian independently. "I am a stranger here."

The woman sighed.

"The more fortunate you! I have the ill-fate to be a resident!"

"It's not a bad place, surely," said Josian with a smile.

Mrs. Summerhayes regarded her gravely from the depths of the straw bonnet.

"No; not entirely. There are compensations for most things," she said, adding thoughtfully, "Life would scarcely be endurable else."

"I wonder!" laughed the girl. "Life's so interesting; there's always something."

So she had found, even in her quiet home—how much more in her uncle's household.

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Summerhayes dryly. "There's invariably—something. But it isn't always pleasant."

"Why did you stop me, ma'am?" asked the girl, perceiving now that the stranger was possessed of an even greater refinement than she had at first supposed.

"To do you a service."

"Then I can but thank you! But since we are strangers, ma'am——"

"Yes, yes," Mrs. Summerhayes broke in quickly, "you are surprised, no doubt. Let that pass. Will you walk as far as my house with me?"

Josian went with her, after a moment's thought, passing beneath the straw-thatched porch which yesterday had sheltered Demetrius Matravers. It was, moreover, into the same room in which had been held his interview with Mrs. Summerhayes that she now introduced the girl. It was dark and gloomy even on this bright summer day.

"Sit down," said the elder woman, and seated herself with her back to the light.

Then she remained looking at her visitor for so long in silence that Josian's wonder grew.

"Yes, ma'am?" she said at last with an independent air, not yet resentful, but having the promise of becoming so.

"I wonder," said the other, "whether you would mind removing your hat?"

It was a dainty piece of headgear, with a wide brim that shaded the girl's face.

" No," Josian replied a little doubtfully, and at once complied with a request that was all the more singular because the lady who was now in her own house had made no attempt to remove either her bonnet or shawl.

Josian untied her blue ribbons and laid her hat aside. The light, such as it was, fell fully upon her fresh young face, ripe in its sparkling beauty. Mrs. Summerhayes seemed loath to take her eyes from the pretty sight, but while she looked, and so on to the end of the interview, Josian was unable to rid herself of the impression that this woman secretly disliked her.

The notion had, on the face of it, no show of reason. The manner of her hostess was perfectly quiet and well-bred, her tones and words friendly in the extreme, her very overtures seeming to indicate an amiable purpose. Where lay the discrepancy between manner and motive Josian herself could hardly have told in set words ; if anywhere, the latent unfriendliness was suggested by the cool grey eyes, which had a singularly immobile expression, as though a film or mask had been allowed to conceal their real quality.

The scrutiny to which Josian was subjected was so long and careful that she grew restive under it, and at length lowered her eyes. Then she heard her companion draw a long breath, and, looking up again, found Mrs. Summerhayes sitting very quietly with her hands in her lap.

" Please, may I put my hat on ? " Josian asked a little defiantly.

" Yes, do. You are certainly very pretty, Miss Trehane."

Josian flushed with annoyance. Somehow the compliment sounded like an affront. She busied herself with the ribbons, and made no reply.

" You have often been told so, no doubt," the cool voice went on. " Not by women, of course, but by men."

" Indeed, ma'am, you're wrong ! " Josian snapped out viciously. " I've been told so no oftener, probably, than yourself."

She bit her lip as soon as the words were uttered, and looked to be shown the door the next moment. But when her rosy shame permitted her to steal a glance at the refined features of her companion she found no sparkle of resentment in the strange, elusive eyes. A little bitter smile parted the well-formed lips—that was all.

" It is you who are wrong, Miss Trehane," Mrs. Summerhayes said. " I have heard many pretty speeches in my time. Though, for that matter, I am not an old woman yet."

" Indeed, no," murmured the contrite girl.

" Still," the other went on in a livelier tone, " I have had my romance, such as it was, and yours is still at its height. I hope it will be long before you outlive it."

Josian laughed.

" You're extremely good, ma'am ; but I don't think my romance has even begun yet."

Mrs. Summerhayes looked at her in frowning surprise.

" Pardon me, but I certainly understood that—forgive me if I put the matter bluntly. I live out of the world, and have forgotten the fine phrases of a polite society."

" Yes ? You have heard—what, pray ? "

" That you have recently formed an attachment."

Josian was wildly indignant. The hot blood spread its scarlet across the cream of her cheek.

" Madam," she cried, " you have been misinformed ! "

" In that case, I must apologize. I'm very sorry to have repeated an idle rumour."

" Rumour ? " cried Josian, her eyes very bright. " What rumour, pray ? Surely these chaw-bacons have not had the impudence to gossip about me ? "

Mrs. Summerhayes smiled.

" I'm afraid they have, Miss Trehane. I heard it stated only an hour ago that you had recently——"

" I don't want to hear it ! 'Tis nothing to me what they say ! There's not a word of truth in it, however ! "

The other seemed faintly amused.

" You're very emphatic, Miss Trehane. I wonder if Mr. Jermyn himself would be so indignant ? "

" Oh ! "

Josian gave a little gasp and sat back, looking at her companion. Then she let out another monosyllable.

" He ! " she said.

" Mr. Jermyn—yes."

" Absurd ! " said Josian, knitting her beautiful brows.

" If you call it so, of course it is. Rumour is a careless hussy, and generally picks out the most unlikely targets for her shafts. Yet the gentleman himself is not altogether to be despised, surely."

" What do you know of Mr. Jermyn ?

" Nothing but what my own eyes have told me. I never saw him till yesterday."

"Ah! We drove through the village."

"You did. I happened to be standing inside a shop and saw your chaise pass. The shopkeeper pointed you out to me. Mr. Jermyn had to go to the mare's head. She was frightened at something."

"I remember," said Josian, recalling, also, Jermyn's savage treatment of the restive animal.

"I thought Mr. Jermyn a very handsome, well-set-up young man."

"He never struck me as being particularly young."

"Not a boy, of course. But of an interesting age—past the crudities of youth and still well away from the solidity of middle-age."

"He seems to have been fortunate enough to interest you, madam."

"You evidently think that strange. But consider how dull and monotonous a life I lead in this pitiful hamlet. You would then scarcely wonder when I admit that even that very dubious young man who waits upon your uncle gave me something to think about for a few hours."

"Do you mean Demetrius Jordan?" asked Josian, controlling her temper as well as she could.

"I think that is what he calls himself. He comes into the village on errands occasionally, and I have amused myself with his gossip about his betters."

"Gossip? I didn't think he ever gossiped to anyone."

"You can never trust a servant. If I were you, Miss Trehane, since this foolish linking of your name with Mr. Jermyn's has annoyed you so much, I should certainly speak to this young man. He was in the village yesterday, and 'tis only reasonable to suppose that the false rumour came from him."

"I scarcely think it, ma'am," said Josian with a stiffness beyond her years. "He seems to me an exceptionally reserved young man."

Mrs. Summerhayes permitted herself a peculiar smile.

"Indeed," cried Josian at that, "I'd be very sorry to hurt him by suggesting such a thing! And whether you asked me in to congratulate me on a circumstance that doesn't exist, or to warn me against an impossibility, I'm equally your obliged servant, ma'am, and I'll do myself the honour to wish you a very good morning!"

And the girl, with the attractive warmth of a generous indig-

nation glowing rosily on her cheek, was moving towards the door before Mrs. Summerhayes had risen.

"Ah," said that lady as she followed her, "Mr. Jordan has a firm advocate, I see. Is it his good looks, or his misfortunes, or that pleasant sense of mystery which hangs around him, that he has to thank for it, I wonder?"

"As he is so great a gossip, madam," Josian answered without turning round, "no doubt he will be ready to tell you himself which of the three has seemed to interest me the most."

In the road, a minute afterwards, she blushed hotly over the indiscreet speech, which practically amounted to an admission of the young man's claim to every quality set forth by the elder woman. But at the moment her resentment at her companion's moral intrusion effectually prevented any desire on her own part to check a tongue always impatient of control.

So the two parted, having gone as near to the edge of a quarrel as was consistent with a ten minutes' acquaintanceship and the delicacy of their sex and breeding; which is not to say that there was a better feeling on either side than would have existed between a couple of men after an open rupture.

Mrs. Summerhayes, as was her habit, watched her visitor down the pathway to the gate. After Josian's light muslin skirts had flicked themselves out of sight—for so intense was this young woman's vitality that it appeared to animate all her personal appendages—Mrs. Summerhayes withdrew from the door with a thoughtful face.

"Eustace, Eustace!" she murmured, when back in her gloomy sitting-room once more. "Oh, Eustace, you have a powerful rival in that young man, unless I'm much mistaken. Better take care, and use your fascinations quickly if you don't want to lose the prize!"

She sat down again in her former seat, and conjured up the figure of the girl who had just quitted the opposite chair.

"You're a beauty—yes, no doubt about that. And with enough temper to hold a man whether you wish it or not. Rich, too, I suppose. Oh, yes, a handsome prize. Well, well, your pride should save you, my dear, from making a fool of yourself with that well-favoured young castaway who cleans your pretty shoes! And, if a word of mine can put his rival on his guard, why not?"

She took out her desk, and spent the best part of an hour in writing and rewriting some half-dozen lines. Before they were

arranged in their final form, Josian Trehane had added another experience to those engendered by her visit to her uncle's domain.

She had walked away from Mrs. Summerhayes s house at a great rate, keeping both her cheek and her temper warm as she went.

" Abominable insolence ! " her maiden thoughts ran indignantly. " What on earth did the creature mean ? How dare she ! Mr. Jermyn, indeed ! Demetrius, indeed ! I hate the pair of them ! "

A third of the way along the straight road that ran to the Abbey had been covered when her going became slow. A figure had detached itself from the bank beneath the blackberry hedge and was coming towards her. She recognized it. It was Jermyn.

She had, at this particular moment, less desire to meet the man than usual, but since he was already advancing, hat in hand, in her direction, and the involuntary slackening of her pace had betrayed her recognition, she could not avoid him in the straight road without deliberately turning her back on him. A trick not beyond her, truly, but too pointed, as her girlish acumen told her, not to offer the greatest provocation to a man of Jermyn's audacity. And, all the while that she thought so, her feet were slowly carrying her towards the man himself. A minute later he was at her side.

" Miss Trehane, why are you so cruel ? " he exclaimed in his pleasantest manner as he bowed, looking very handsome in his insolent way.

" I don't know what you mean, Mr. Jermyn."

" You said you were walking to the village. I entreated to be allowed to accompany you. You did not decline my escort, yet you slip away unawares and leave me to kick my heels to a pretty tune of impatience for a full hour before I learn of your departure alone. Isn't that an outrageous way to treat a man, Miss Trehane ? "

" I don't see how I was to blame," said the girl coldly. His mere presence irked her lest some field labourer, glancing over the hedge, should detect it and give additional colour to the rumour which she supposed was already afloat. " I did not promise to walk with you," she added.

" No. Yet I am here."

" So I see."

" And does that teach you nothing ? "

" A good deal," replied Josian shortly.

" May I know what ? " he asked.

" You won't like it."

" Allow me to judge. Sharp medicines have their uses sometimes."

Josian daintily shrugged her shoulders. She determined not to mitigate the draught.

" As you please, Mr. Jermyn. Well, then, I think you a disagreeably persistent person, inconsiderate both to yourself and to others."

Jermyn regarded her from the corner of his eye.

" How does that apply ? " he asked.

" I should have thought you'd understand easily."

" I love a fair interpreter," he said.

" Well "—she threw back her head and looked at him—" in the first place, I didn't want you ; and, in the second, you must have known it, and so showed a lack of self-esteem by coming at all."

Jermyn burst out laughing.

" Ably put, Miss Trehane ! I admit the impeachment, and applaud the reasoning. But allow me to put another question."

" Since we are bound to walk in the same direction, we may as well talk, I suppose," said the girl in a non-committal way.

" Have you not asked yourself," Jermyn continued, " what such an obvious lack of self-esteem implies in a man ready enough to maintain his position in all other respects ? "

" No, I haven't. I've not had time."

" Will you do so now ? "

Josian stared over the hedge at a flight of rooks newly arisen from a half-reaped field.

" I'm afraid I'm not interested," she said.

As she was not regarding him Jermyn allowed himself to look annoyed. Certainly she gave him no encouragement. But a moment's contemplation of her half-averted face had the effect of smoothing the ill temper from his own. After all, the girl was a witch, alluring for her own sake, quite apart from her father's money-bags. To such, with everything still in the balance, much should be forgiven.

" May I try to interest you, Miss Trehane ? " he asked.

" In what, Mr. Jermyn ? "

" In myself."

Josian shook her head.

" Unless you are very patient, I wouldn't advise it," she told him.

" I can be very patient—with you."

" It would please me better if you were more so in other directions."

He shot a quick glance at her, but again she was looking away.

" Will you tell me what you mean?" he asked humbly enough.

" No; for 'tis not worth while."

" That means you don't want me to please you, I suppose. Now you, Miss Trehane, please me whether I will or no."

" That's very puzzling," said Josian.

" I mean that whatever you do is right to me, therefore I'm not always wanting to adapt your ways to my point of view—even when they don't really agree with it."

" Perhaps," said Josian, " that pleases me best of all."

" Then I say again that you are cruel."

Josian bit her lip over the obvious application of his previous argument, and stepped forward in silence. Insensibly, Jermyn moved nearer to her side.

" Miss Trehane," he began anew, " God knows you give me scanty encouragement. A more diffident man would have perished of your coldness long ago. But at the risk of offending you still further I must speak out. I love you, and such as my love and my fortune are, both are for your acceptance, if you will please to make them your own. No great gifts in themselves, perhaps, but at least the love is pure and the fortune honest, and the joy of giving, a greater blessing than any I have hitherto known. Miss Trehane, if I am old-fashioned and blunt at this the most important crisis of my life, let it stand to my credit. If I cared less, if less were at stake, I might be able to find fine phrases and to express myself in a more pleasing way. As it is, I offer you the love of an honest man, whose sole happiness in life shall be to make yours equally happy, if you will give him the right to do so."

As he was speaking, Josian's feet moved ever more slowly until as he ended they halted together. She crossed to the side of the road, and leant against the bank, a genuine discomfiture written on her face. Jermyn followed her, and stood, his head on a higher level, at her side. Very reluctantly she spoke.

" I'm sorry," she said, her eyes on the ground. " I can't give you that right, Mr. Jermyn. Please don't speak of this again."

But the man's ear was well attuned to the niceties of feminine tones, more especially in such scenes as this, and he had caught the indication of unwillingness that lay behind her speech.

"You cannot send me away with so poor a dismissal as that," he urged. "You must give me a reason for such discouragement."

Josian wavered; not from any doubt as to her own feelings, but because the situation bade fair to be an embarrassing one. To accept this man's love was a thing impossible, but, if she deliberately told him so, could she depend upon his sense of delicacy not to put her in a false position by remaining at the Tower after she had refused him? Her instinctive knowledge of the man told her that she could not.

The obvious alternative was to leave the place herself. But to leave it with her mission unfulfilled? Before she had even received her father's final instructions? What a poor figure she would cut in his eyes, and what untold disaster might she not thus bring upon him! Dismissing the notion as impracticable, she considered the only way left—to temporize with Jermyn until at least she felt sure of her footing.

This course, to one of Josian Trehane's downright and unconventional character, was distasteful in the extreme. She did not love Jermyn; she did not even like him. At the first, her girlish vanity, all the more susceptible because hitherto it had had so little to feed upon, had risen to his subtle flattery. He had interested her—in a less degree than Demetrius Jordan, but more than her cousin Silas—and he had amused her. He had brought a spice of the great world of which she knew so little to leaven his conversation; he was well-read, well-mannered, and possessed a plenitude of the insidious arts with which men of fashion from time immemorial have bedazzled country maids, gentle and simple alike. But this girl's sound sense, and the propinquity of another man whose appeal to her sympathy equalled that to her interest, had saved her from accepting Jermyn's meretricious value as his real worth. If he ever had had a chance of capturing her ignorance, that chance had died almost as soon as it had been born.

All of this, although Josian was vaguely aware of it, was impossible to explain to the man at her side, who clearly expected an answer.

Honesty burst from her lips before she was well aware:

" Mr. Jermyn, I don't love you. And you have done several things which make me certain that I never could do so."

Hardened as he was, he reddened beneath her simple frankness.

" That's a sweeping assertion," he said, " and I'm not of the temper to protest like a stage hero that as a gentleman I'm bound to respect your decision and to say no more. You ought at least to let me know how I have offended you."

Josian's own colour rose at that. She felt that this was no moment to allude to the part he had played in Demetrius's chastisement on the previous night, though that was what was mainly in her mind.

" You lose your temper too easily," she returned, " and vent your ill humour on helpless things."

" Please give me an instance," he urged, his look unpleasant.

" When the mare shied yesterday——" she began.

But he caught her up quickly :

" Are you sure you are not thinking of something nearer home ? "

Josian met his ironical glance fairly.

" Perhaps I am," she said with defiance. " Mr. Jermyn, you couldn't expect me to be pleased at—that ! "

He controlled himself admirably.

" And if I admit that I was in the wrong ? " he asked, taking the line of least resistance.

" I don't know. It seems to make it worse."

He laughed—an agreeable soft laugh, pleasing to a woman's ear.

" Come, come," he pleaded, venturing to lay his hand lightly on her shoulder, " you mustn't judge me by that. After all, the fellow deserved it."

" I don't agree ! " she retorted hotly. " And, in any case, it was none of your business."

" Well, to be perfectly frank, the fellow has frequently annoyed me by his insolence and inattention, and I thought a little correction would do him no harm."

" I've not found him either insolent or inattentive."

" No," was Jermyn's cool rejoinder. " He wouldn't be—to you. But there's enough and to spare of your uncle's servant. I can't believe, moreover, that you are going to be unjust enough to reject the love I offer you for a little natural spurt of temper like that."

" You're forgetting my other reason, Mr. Jermyn."

" I can't forget it. You hurt me too cruelly to allow of that. But by trying to sweep away your prejudices I am hoping to place myself in a better light. Don't think that I blame you. I should love you all the more for your sweet and tender mind if mine was capable of holding you in any higher esteem than it does already."

" Mr. Jermyn, I can say no more and nothing else than I have said ! Don't make me repeat what it can give you no pleasure to hear ! "

" Josian ! "

She sprang to her feet. All thought of temporizing had vanished now. The man's audacious familiarity was an insult. She would not bear it ; she would complain to her uncle. Jermyn should go.

" How dare you ? " she cried. " Haven't I said enough ? Do you want me to tell you plainly how much I detest you and your ways ? "

" Yes," he answered, passion springing tor the first time into his eyes as he looked at her. " Yes ; if only it makes you yet more beautiful ! "

What her charms alone and her cool friendship had failed to do, had been accomplished by the frank expression of her active dislike. Desire flamed suddenly in his heart. Her disdain had quickened his lukewarmness into passion. He could have framed his love-making in more burning phrases now. He had begun his wooing coolly and self-interestedly ; piqued by her first discouragements, he had urged himself more warmly to the task ; her plain rejection stimulated his eagerness. But the longing for possession of her defiant youth and beauty came hotly upon him at the end, and he swore to himself that he would not let her go until he had set the seal of his passion on her lips.

Reading his purpose in his eyes, Josian turned to escape. He flung his arm round her and caught her back. For an instant her head lay against his shoulder. He bent down. She raised a vigorous young arm and struck him again and again, then wrenched herself free, her lips untouched, and tore away on feet that scarcely pressed the ground, never slackening her pace until she flung herself, panting and glowing, against the closed doors of the Abbey.

It was long in opening. She beat upon it frantically, clanged the bell, and called aloud, in dread lest her pursuer should race

round the corner before she gained admittance. But moments passed and he did not appear, and presently the door began to move.

It was opened by Demetrius, who had dragged himself from the bed where he lay half-dressed to answer her wild summons. The task of attending to the door had been delegated temporarily to young Drenchard, who was deliberately neglecting it.

Josian rushed in, and herself banged to the door.

"Lock it!" she cried. "Keep him out!"

"What is it, miss?" asked Demetrius, his hands trying to keep up with hers.

"Mr. Jermyn—he—he's just behind. I want him kept out until I've got away!"

"I'll see to that, miss."

The bars were fixed, the key turned, and Josian was leaning half exhausted in the corner before a smart pull at the bell announced her pursuer's arrival.

"There he is!" she whispered, alert in a moment.

"I'll keep him waiting until you're out of sight, Miss Trehane."

Jermyn kicked the door.

"I'll go," said Josian, drawing her breath more easily. "You mustn't keep him waiting too long. He's in a terrible rage as it is. Pretend you didn't hear! Yes—he's angry. . . . Demetrius, I struck him. The beast tried to kiss me!"

Demetrius's clenched hand drove the nails into his palm.

"The scoundrel! He shall wait."

"I'll go now. Thank you, oh, thank you, Demetrius."

She caught his straining hand, pressed it lightly between her own, and ran away. Three minutes later Demetrius opened the door.

Jermyn strode in from the sunshine, his face dark with anger.

"What the devil do you mean by keeping me waiting?" he demanded, as his foot touched the flagged yard.

Demetrius closed the door in silence.

"Didn't you hear me speak?" the other asked.

"Yes."

"Then why don't you answer?"

"I thought you would probably guess the answer for yourself."

"You insolent blackguard! No need for much guessing!

D'ye think I couldn't hear you and Miss Trehane whispering together t'other side of the door ? "

Demetrius hung up the key without replying. Turning, he caught the back of Jermyn's hand swung heavily across his mouth.

" You damned murderer, I'll remember this ! " were the words that went with the blow.

But Demetrius, unheeding, was gazing with fascinated eyes at the hand which Josian had touched.

XXV

INTERIM

THE week of grace went slowly by.

To outward seeming, but little of importance occurred at the Tower, nothing, in fine, likely to affect the community as a whole. Here and there relations were noticeably strained with an ever-increasing tension. Tempers were short or hot or savage according to the characteristics of their possessors, and there were no more genial excursions made in company. Crumpler, according to his habit, remained at home; the younger men went abroad severally, and seemed bent on avoiding each other. Josian, raging inwardly at the falseness of the position into which loyalty to her father had thrust her, spent much of her time in her own room, and as little as possible in her uncle's studio.

She had carried out her threat of complaining to her relative of the behaviour of his guest. Crumpler, at this stage, was disinclined to take sides against Jermyn. To all her vehement indignation he had but one reply—a peculiarly humiliating one in the circumstances: "If you don't like it, you can go." Whereat Josian bit her red lips, and remained.

For the present, Jermyn did not pursue her, but whether this was due to the fact that her self-respect kept her inaccessible, or because he was afraid of driving her away, the girl neither knew nor cared. It was enough that he let her alone.

Meanwhile, she waited anxiously for a reply to her letter. It came towards the end of the week, and its purpose was of a nature to surprise her.

"Do nothing for the present," Trehane wrote. "What you tell me is of the utmost gravity, and far beyond your powers of management. I will myself come down as soon as possible, probably within two or three days from this, and endeavour to arrive, at the worst, at some settlement with Mr. Crumpler and

his stepson. You are grievously to blame for not acquainting me with the latter's presence at Bindon as soon as he arrived. Of his companion I know nothing. In the meanwhile do your utmost to keep both your uncle Mr. Crumpler and young Drenchard in a good humour.

"With regard to the young man of whom you speak, I fear that I can do nothing. It is never wise to interfere between master and man, and in this case my position does not encourage the attempt. I would warn you at the same time not to be led away by your feminine susceptibility to tales of distress. You will find that in nine cases out of ten a man's misfortunes arise either from his own indiscretion or his own vice."

Josian frowned and pouted over the letter like a schoolgirl. If she obeyed it in any particular, it was more from a reluctance to incur her father's anger than from either a sense of filial duty or any pleasure in the act itself.

The only active obedience demanded of her was one which might have laid her open to a charge of caprice, had her uncle been less satisfied with the result. Whereas she had hitherto, from motives of policy, done all she could to delay the completion of the bust, she was now at Crumpler's service whenever he required her. It was the simplest, and as far as she could see, the only way to keep him in that state of quiescent cantankerousness which in him passed for good humour. With regard to her cousin, Josian was shy of doing anything that might turn his thoughts in her direction.

Crumpler made heavy demands upon her time. The Prometheus was at a standstill, for Demetrius was still unfit for the arduous task of posing in the studio. Mind and body acting and reacting upon each other had produced an intermittent fever that rendered him incapable of performing even the lightest of duties.

For the first two or three days his condition alarmed the self-centred interests of his master, and, assured that the illness was genuine and not a mere sulky fit, he set himself to minister to the sick lad with both patience and skill. Demetrius's hungry heart opened out beneath the gentler handling, and when the worst symptoms of the malady were passed he made more than one attempt to warn the old man of the conspiracy against him.

At each endeavour Crumpler's impatience broke out into open querulousness, but on the whole he was more tolerant of his

servant's interference than might have been expected. The truth was, he was learning to value the young man, and in his own grim way to appreciate his unfailing willingness and trustworthy conduct. But against his stepson's friend he would hear no word.

" Can't tell what have come to ye all," he grumbled, at Demetrius's third attempt to convict Jermyn of proposed dishonesty. " First 'twas the maid Trehane, now 'tis you. Let the man alone, I say. What's the harm in him ? He's a fine eye for talent, and a rare understanding of a man o' genius. And, to the heel of that, 'twas my boy brought him here."

" The sooner Mr. Drenchard takes him away again the better for you, sir," said Demetrius earnestly. " I have told you that he is planning to rob you. Have you forgotten that ? "

" I fancy ye did hint at some such fool's yarn t'other day. He he, 'tis a good one too ! Rob me ? Rob old Crumpler that the Academy won't recognize—cuss their jealousy !—and the fine patrons of Art won't give a commission to ? He he, you're dreaming, lad ; the fever han't gone out o' your blood yet. Why, the man had better rob the first tatterdemalion mommet he comes to—there'd be a doit o' sense in that ! But rob old Robert Crumpler—why, he'd be a born fool to think o' it ! "

" Sir," cried Demetrius in despair, " tax the man with it ! Tell him, if you please, that I have warned you. I'd sooner bear the consequences of that than see you wronged by a scoundrel such as I know him to be ! "

The old man turned sharply, his grim features softened a little.

" Eh, what's that ? " he cried. " Han't I been a hard master to 'ee ? "

" I don't say that you've not. But at least, sir, I owe much to you."

" So you do, my lad, so you do. And I'm not regretting my part in pulling you out of the grave. Only let's have no more of this sick folly, or I'll have to physic you after another fashion."

And the sculptor stumped away, leaving despair behind him Only two days now remained before Demetrius's final testing.

Crumpler, in the meantime, did not carry his conviction to the supreme height of folly. He waylaid Jermyn at an early opportunity and sidled round the subject.

" My young man do seem to have got a spite against you," he said with a suddenness calculated to throw a guilty man off his balance.

But Jermyn had learnt self-control in a mixed school, and kept his head under this covert attack.

" I'm not surprised to hear it," he answered easily. " Your young man's a sulky devil. I helped you to chastise him the other day. Naturally, he's no liking for me."

And he passed on, carrying off an awkward situation with a disarming airiness.

" 'Tis all malice and spite," the sculptor muttered against his servant. " The lad's a liar so well as a murderer."

But Jermyn's easy mood lasted no longer than while the other's eyes were on his face. He got out into the open air and mentally exploded.

This was the second time in this quietly eventful week that he had had reason to regard Demetrius less as a tool than as a menace to his plans. Some days previously a paper had found its way into his hand, and the message contained therein, though lacking the force of a surprise, had all the strength of a confirmation.

The communication held no clue to the writer. It was undated and unsigned, penned in an illiterate hand, and brought to him by a youth who proved to be deaf and dumb. Jermyn opened it gingerly, for it was none too clean. It ran :

" Take heed to yourself if you would win your prize. Demetrius Jordan is as handsome as you and has his misfortunes to recommend him in a young girl's eyes. A well-wisher sends you this."

Failing by a questioning of the messenger to achieve any result beyond the loss of his own temper, Jermyn dismissed the boy with a blow on the head, and puzzled over the note for several minutes. One thing in particular struck him. The writer apparently had been careful to assume a poor style of penmanship, and had neglected to bring the orthography and phrasing to the same level. The explanation was less subtle than Jermyn supposed, the truth being that Mrs. Summerhayes had aimed at anonymity irrespective of suggesting any class distinction. She had therefore penned her letter with her left hand and had used the forceful language that came natural to her.

The puzzle held the recipient at gaze without conveying a hint of solution. But, as the body of the missive was of more importance than either the writer or the manner of its delivery, Jermyn turned his attention at length to the warning itself.

The suggestion was no new one ; such a possibility had been

in his mind for some time. But its confirmation by the stranger, a mere looker-on, tended naturally to impress his own selfish fears, thus gaining a weight out of proportion to its *prima facie* value.

Had Demetrius been nothing but the ill-used drudge that he was supposed to be, or had Jermyn accepted him as such, the suspicions of the man of fashion would not have risen at the thought of so poor a rival. Robert Crumpler's serving-man, whatever degree of good looks he might have possessed, would, in truth, never have been regarded as a rival at all. Even Josian's obvious interest would have passed as a mere girlish curiosity about a well-favoured young man of the lower class. But Jermyn, behind the scenes of Demetrius's history, was unable to separate him from his true position in life, and this, in the elder man's present nervous and irritable state of mind, biased his outlook considerably.

As a member of a family which, although now unimportant and dying out, had once been one of the most distinguished and influential in Dorset, Demetrius Matravers was a fitting match for a daughter of the Trehanes, who only in the present generation were beginning to come into prominence. And, although it was unreasonable to suppose that Josian herself knew anything of all this, the fact was there—insensibly colouring the young man's every word and gesture—and there was no blinking it.

Hence the reason why, when Demetrius was for the second time presented in the light of an interferer with his plans, Jermyn whistled, swore, looked thoughtful, and swore again.

Then he sought out young Drenchard.

"That damned Demetrius of yours has turned traitor," he announced when they were out of all possible earshot.

"He's more your possession than mine," grumbled Drenchard. "What's he been doing now?"

"Warning the old man, it seems," Jermyn returned with a grim look.

Drenchard drew a deep breath. Consternation and relief struggled within him.

"How do you know?"

"From some words your amiable relative let fall."

"Oh! It's—it's all up, then?"

"Devil a bit! He's not convinced yet, I fancy. And you may rest assured that I put a spoke in our friend's wheel at once."

" A bullet in his gizzard would be more to the purpose ! "

" That's where you're wrong. We can't afford to choke him off just yet. The law will do that for us when we've done with him. What's the matter, Sly—cravat too tight ? "

" But, I say, Jermyn, you'll give the fellow a chance ? Let him run for it, won't you ? "

" Oh, he can run as fast as his legs will carry him, but he won't get very far probably. However, that's his affair."

" Upon my soul, Jermyn, I almost wish you hadn't made it mine ! "

Jermyn made a gesture of impatience.

" Look here, Sly, I'm not going all over that ground again. You've far more to gain than I. And whether you like it or not you're in now and must stay in. Though if I'd known what a poor chicken-heart you are, wanting to back out now that I stand fairly committed——"

" Hold your tongue ! I never said I wanted to back out altogether. But why the devil can't you leave it where it is—where Matravers thinks it is, I mean ? "

" Because the fellow threatens me in another direction, damn his impudence ! "

" You mean Josian."

" Yes, I do. He got a good lead, it seems, before I arrived."

Drenchard nodded.

" He's a decent looking chap, would be, but for his hair. hat's a disfigurement."

" Not to a woman—a sentimental girl. Sly, you asked me why I don't leave things at a certain point. I'll tell you the truth—I dare not ! Don't you see what I mean ? Matravers must be got rid of. Morally and physically he must go."

" Do you think Josian's in love with him ? "

" I think she may be. He's certainly in love with her."

" I've seen 'em together when you were out of the way. He came outside yesterday ; she met him and they walked together for half an hour. He pretended to be gathering wood, but he was idling half the time, talking to her. I was watching 'em through the bushes."

Jermyn's eyes glittered.

" Just so ! I want to crush him utterly in her eyes."

" Well, can't you do it without getting him hanged again ? Tell her about the other affair."

" What an argumentative fellow you are, Sly, and how

imperceptive! If I tell her now, I lose one of my best weapons against him."

"Nonsense! A man's life's worth more than a man's love any day. You can threaten that."

Jermyn sighed wearily.

"What an Old Bailey Special Pleader you'd have made, Sly! But to come back to the point. There may be something in what you say—though with Matravers one can't be certain—but your cousin, I'm afraid, wouldn't be disposed to think ill of him on my word alone, although, of course, he doesn't know that. And if he got clear of the theft—the theft, mind!—the old man might suspect me—I mean, us now that Matravers has blabbed out something; which would, in effect, be putting my —our necks in the noose, and leaving Josian for him."

"Hang the girl! She seems to have set you more determinedly than ever on the thing."

Jermyn's face changed. A wave of emotion crossed it like a shadow.

"I want her," he said shortly.

"Her money, you mean," sneered Drenchard.

"No. Herself. I should want her just as much if she hadn't a penny in the world. I don't expect you, a cold-blooded insensate young cub like you, to understand. You never felt all your desires, all your ambitions, all your sense of beauty and adorableness swayed by the witchery of a woman's eyes! you don't know what it is to demand her with every fibre of your body, to long for her with every pulse-beat, so that the damnation of your soul seems a poor price to pay for one of her kisses! No, you never felt all that, my Sly, and you never will. But that's how I feel when your cousin passes me with her head turned away, and her mouth drawing me on all the while. Walks and talks with Matravers, does she? Well, then, damn him, Matravers must go!"

Silas Drenchard looked at him as contemptuously as he dared. "I never knew you were a fool before!" he said.

XXVI

THE KNAVE OF DIAMONDS

IT was the Knave of Diamonds that brought matters to a head.

After the momentary interview with Crumpler, Jermyn cultivated the old man's society more than formerly in order to remove any suspicion which Demetrius might have succeeded in planting in his master's mind. When he chose he could be a pleasant and judicious companion enough, and as he had, early in their intercourse, put his finger on the other's vulnerable spot, he had now no difficulty in suiting his conversation to his company in the most polished fashion. He fooled Robert Crumpler on the side of his vanity to the top of his bent; and flattered himself at the end of the next day that he had advanced considerably in his host's favour. For his part, Crumpler gave signs of some inward cause of satisfaction, and exhibited so equitable a temper that Drenchard grew uneasy.

"I never knew him so amiable," he confided to his friend, who was giving himself airs on the strength of his success. "Up to mischief, mark my words!"

But Jermyn merely smiled, and, greatly daring, invited the old man that evening to join him and Drenchard at cards.

"I don't play," Crumpler said shortly. "Ask the girl."

But Josian, who had enough to do in humouring her uncle to please her father, and in avoiding Jermyn to please herself, had fled away to her own room, whither none of them ventured to follow her. Accordingly, the two younger men sat down alone.

They were in the room which served as living room for the household, and both had expected Crumpler to quit it as soon as they settled down to their game. But he remained, at first occupying himself among his models and carvings scattered about the room. Then he approached the players, and standing behind his stepson's chair watched the game for some time in

silence. It was new to him, as it would have been to most men, being, in truth, a game invented by Jermyn himself, which had been extremely popular at his favourite Fast and Loose Club, until the detection of his own private method of interpreting the rules of his own making led to the banishment of game and inventor alike. But the game was a clever one for all that.

On the present occasion Drenchard was playing badly. At the beginning of the amusement, which had come to be a recognized thing during this last week, he had been thrown off his balance by the discovery that the ostensibly bankrupt Jermyn was well enough supplied with current coin to make a start at play. Taxed with the deception, the man of the town explained that he always made a point of maintaining a reserve. But the occurrence had upset the parsimonious Drenchard, and matters were not improved by the fact that fortune favoured the arch-deceiver. Drenchard was unable to resist the influence of petty annoyances, and consequently played with a head less clear than he should have done. He went, as Jermyn once remarked, out of his way to lose.

He was doing the same now, with an ill grace as usual, when suddenly Crumpler's harsh voice struck across the heads of the players.

"I'll join ye," he said.

Instantly Jermyn was all complaisance. An old bird was as easy to pluck as a young one. He pulled forward another chair, and began at once to instruct his latest pupil in the rules of the game. Drenchard scowled uneasily. The old man's breath on the nape of his neck had been bad enough; to have him placed opposite to him was worse. It was a combination which the young man had avoided these last few days by taking his meals at odd hours, alone. Crumpler leant across the table and patted his arm.

"You'm losing more than a lad should," he cackled. "Gi' me a coin or two, an' we'll roast him between us."

His stepson sullenly parted with two coins. The stakes were low, little and often being Jermyn's tactics at present.

A fresh game was started, but Drenchard's bad fortunes did not mend. Nor had the new-comer any better luck, which circumstance reflected unfairly upon the younger man, for Crumpler played solely at his expense. He provided the double stakes ungraciously, and once ventured on a protest. His stepfather eyed him in reproachful surprise.

" What ? Grudge me another crown piece ? When you know that what's mine'll be yours some day ? "

" Don't act like a miser, Sly," admonished Jermyn as he raked in the coins.

So the game proceeded, Jermyn continuing to win, a fact upon which he frequently commented with his pleasant laugh. Drenchard's temper grew more vile as the minutes passed. Jermyn was adroitly driving him to raging point ; and, when the younger man protested surlily that he would play no more, twitted him so smartly on his poor-spiritedness that Drenchard sat down again heavily and continued to play. Under these conditions the game was carried on long after the accustomed time, so that when Demetrius came in at the usual hour to set the table for the evening meal the three men were still absorbed in their play.

He waited by the door, watching the game.

And then a curious thrill moved him, and insensibly drew him farther into the room. He found himself taking a lively interest in the play, and knew that at some time in his previous life he, too, must have sat even as these, and played with pieces of coloured pasteboard to the jingling of coin and rustle of paper. The sight now held him with an odd fascination, and all at once there rushed upon him one of those half-memories, gone before well-grasped, which constituted one of his greatest torments. He closed his eyes momentarily in the useless effort to recapture it.

When he looked again, Jermyn, who had been in the act of dealing the cards at his last view, was now meditating his play.

The game went on. Demetrius followed every movement of it not only with interest, but with understanding. A portion of the pack lay untouched at Jermyn's elbow ; his hand was spread directly before Demetrius's gaze, who, from his position behind Jermyn's chair, amused himself with deciding the lines of his own play in the other man's place.

Then a pause occurred. It was Drenchard's turn to play a card, and he hesitated. Finally he threw down the Queen of Diamonds, and gasped. Crumpler played the nine, and Jermyn triumphantly produced the King. Drenchard flew into a rage and swore. Demetrius suddenly remembered something. He advanced to the table, and spoke :

" Mr. Jermyn dealt himself the Knave. He ought to have it now. I have not seen him play it," he said.

Some confusion arose. Both Drenchard and Jermyn were on their feet in a moment, both were enraged, both began to speak excitedly.

" It's a lie," said Jermyn, who had at once clapped his hand on the pile of cards at his side. " The Knave must be in here, unless Mr. Crumpler has it. I've not held it to-night."

" That's easily decided," cried Drenchard. " Hand 'em over and let me have a look ! "

" One minute, Sly ! "

Jermyn faced round and met Demetrius's calm gaze. For one instant the two looked at one another, the elder man's usually imperturbable features distorted with fury. Twice he moved his free hand towards the servant, and twice he let it fall again to his side, as though distrustful of his self-control if he allowed himself to touch the other. Once more a conviction, stronger than he had yet experienced, came to Demetrius—a certainty that this scene was a repetition of one lived through in the past. A physical nausea seized him as he strove with all his power for fuller light. Then he felt himself gripped and jerked forward.

" Mr. Crumpler," said Jermyn, who had recovered his usual coolness, " didn't I tell you this fellow had an inveterate spite against me ? "

The sculptor nodded, his glittering eyes fixed on the pair.

" If this wasn't your house, and the man your servant, I'd horsewhip him within an inch of his life ! But I'll leave it to your sense of honour towards a guest to treat him as he deserves."

Crumpler frowned.

" If I thought you'd been cheating of me——" he began.

Jermyn smiled.

" Pray, sir," he urged, " be generous enough not to provoke me anew by a repetition of this scoundrel's infamous lie. Your stepson, my very good friend, the man who would have the greatest right to quarrel with me were there any truth in the vile accusation, shall himself guarantee my unimpeachable honesty." He turned to Drenchard, who had subsided uneasily into his chair, and was biting his nails with a scowling face. " Sly," he said with some sharpness, " do you ask to have the cards examined ? "

Drenchard was on the horns of a dilemma, as his adroit friend had intended him to be. That some jugglery with the cards had taken place he had no manner of doubt. But Jermyn's clever

insinuation that the trick had been done deliberately in order to bring the old man's wrath once more upon Demetrius's head, thereby fermenting a natural rancour on the young man's part, had its effect upon Drenchard's view. Jermyn, he understood, by this direct appeal, was giving him his cue and warning him not to interfere. At the bottom of his heart he had a foolish unjustifiable hope that Jermyn meant to restore the money he had won by trickery. And, in any case, insistence on his part could only lead to an open rupture with his ally which would spell disaster to everything, as Jermyn also probably meant him to understand. Meanwhile, the others were waiting for him to speak. He did so, ungraciously enough, but he followed his friend's lead with the noble loyalty only obtainable among patriots and thieves.

"Your word's good enough for me," he muttered, his eyes on the tablecloth. "If you say you haven't seen the Knave, you haven't. Demetrius is a damned liar, and ought to be kicked."

Jermyn bowed.

"Thank you, Sly. I knew I could reckon on your friendship."

He released Demetrius, and picking up the half pack quickly swept the rest of the cards into his hands.

"As a fitting penance for having been the unwitting cause of so much unpleasantness," he said, "I will offer a burnt sacrifice to the god of chance. Please follow me, gentlemen."

He led them into the kitchen where a fire was burning, tossed the handful of cards into the flames, watched them consumed then turned in his mocking way and bowed.

"So ends a vexatious episode!" he said. "And now let us have supper."

But in spite of his cleverness he was wrong. The end had not yet been reached.

Demetrius went to bed, very thoughtful. He had, much to Drenchard's disappointment, escaped with only the lash of his master's tongue, for Crumpler had been less convinced than Drenchard had affected to be. Moreover, Demetrius's supposed offence had held no animus towards himself. Therefore, the master had felt less personally concerned in the delinquency than on the former occasion.

Sleep went from Demetrius, being kept at bay by the excited condition of his mind. He did not suspect his enemy of having laid a trap for him, neither was it possible that he himself was in error. A trick had been played—probably not the first that

evening—and Demetrius was strangely anxious to determine how. If the Knave of Diamonds, which in this game represented the losing card in the pack, had been surreptitiously slipped in among the unused cards and another extracted in its place, Jermyn would have exposed the whole and so easily have saved his reputation. No ; he must have concealed it about his person where it could be readily got at for the next deal. In that case he would have destroyed it *solus* by now, and his dishonesty could never be proved.

There that part of the affair at any rate might have rested, but Demetrius, about to pass on to a more personal point, suddenly remembered noticing the stealthy withdrawal of the player's hand from beneath the table at the precise moment when he had opened his own eyes after the instantaneous flash of half-awakened memory. It was the insistence of this dim sense of familiarity which reminded him now of an action scarcely noticed at the time.

He raised himself in bed with a pleasurable feeling of discovery. Jermyn, at the moment of his again looking at him, must have just secreted the losing card beneath the table. Probably he had dealt himself a spare one to allow for this contingency.

The desire to go immediately to ascertain the accuracy of this supposition took Demetrius so strongly that he was only deterred from leaving the gatehouse by the impossibility of doing anything until the morning. It was Robert Crumpler's habit to lock the doors of the lower rooms in the Tower and to retain the keys himself.

It was most probable that Jermyn had already secured the damning card, and that search would reveal nothing. But Demetrius, in his keen dislike to the man, desired to leave no chance untouched. There was more behind it, moreover, than mere natural animosity. To convince his master of Jermyn's guilt in the one direction might influence his mind in the more important issue. And the time of grace was growing terribly short.

That this man and himself had met before, Demetrius was now convinced. Recollection, if what seemed rather a nervous instinct could be so called, went farther still. They two, he felt assured, had once faced one another across a card table at a similar scene. A little more—oh, God, such a little more !—and he would remember the whole shadowy incident. And, remembering so much, might he not then remember all the rest ?

He lay palpitating throughout the short summer night, praying strenuously for that additional gleam of light, and that it might usher in the fuller radiance of perfect memory upon his darkened mind—prayed with a hope so keen and agonizing that it almost passed into faith. And all the while his love hung trembling in the background, waiting to know if it might justify itself or not.

The silvery twilight of the poor room widened to a clear light; a little breeze rustled the ivy against the panes. A young bird called aloud. The day had come. And all his feverish whisperings and yearning had brought him no whit nearer to the truth. The door of his mind not only remained closed, but seemed to have become more tightly sealed than before, for now the sharpness of last night's impressions had grown blunted, and he wondered if he had deceived himself in believing that the incident was a reflex of the past. Love, unjustifiable and despairing, crept back like a shameful thing.

He was up and out in the open air early; too soon for his purpose, but not for his peace of mind. A kind of fierce determination burnt within him, a resolve to vindicate himself, to unmask a villain, and to save his master all by one simple act. He deliberately blinded himself to the logical probabilities that had struck him forcibly enough some hours before. For the time he had lost his hold upon reality, and, in face of the lesson of the night, half persuaded himself that the thing so eagerly desired could somehow be brought to pass. So, in a fever of restlessness, he spent the interval between his rising and the time when he heard his master unfastening the main door of the house.

The sound had reached him when he happened to be a hundred feet or so away. And though he ran across the intervening ground Crumpler had disappeared by the time he reached the threshold. Not doubting where he was to be found, Demetrius hurried down to the studio. As he had guessed, the sculptor was there.

The words which had almost sprung from the young man's lips as he went died away. He stood a short space from the doorway in silence. If his head had been covered he would have bared it before the beautiful thing which the old man had given to the world. Admiration of genius and a lover's rapture held him fascinated, and drove his errand from his mind.

In the centre of the studio, upon a pedestal, was placed the

newly finished Flora bust; but to the enraptured eyes of the younger man, who saw it in its completeness for the first time, it was the living presentment of Josian Trehane. No artificial goddess of a worn-out mythology was this exquisite production, now set in the pure material which his own hands—ah, God help him, his hands!—had brought. It was she, the sweet and tender, elusive and impulsive maid of a living human world; she, flower-crowned above arch brows and merry eyes, smiling alluringly, yet holding within those delicately curved lips a subtle aloofness that fascinated while it mocked and humbled the beholder.

Demetrius remained before it in silent worship; his heart hot within him, burning with the desire to fling himself down at her living feet, and lay bare his every heavy secret before her. A kind of yearning faith took hold of him that, if she knew, at least she would understand. Love crept once more from its hiding-place, radiant and unashamed, asking no justification for itself, hopeless indeed, yet not wholly miserable, finding its joy in its own existence, content to feed upon itself, and drawing its greatest glory from its mere continuance. To love was, in truth, the only joy in life which circumstances had left to this poor outcast of the world. And in moments of lesser exaltation it was his crowning curse that love, it seemed, could never hope to gain its highest attribute of service.

Crumpler turned suddenly and saw Demetrius in the doorway. His favourable mood of the previous evening still held, though a more perceptive companion than a lover might have detected a sub-ironic strain in his humour. He beckoned the young man to his side.

"A good thing, eh?" he asked.

Demtrius could scarcely reply.

"You'm no judge, to be sure," the sculptor continued, caressing Flora's cheek with his supple fingers. "But take my word for it, boy, Leonardo couldn't ha' beaten it. There's character, there's life, there's motion. You'd swear she was about to laugh and sing, wouldn't 'ee? Look at that twist of hair! A breath 'ud move it."

"Indeed, you are right, sir. It is wonderful."

"He he, you've a clever man for master, my lad. A man o' genius I be—and may they all rot in their own venom that don't see it! A beauty, a beauty; you'm a fair beauty, my dear!"

The wrinkled old face pressed closer to the rounded cheek

of the bust until the withered lips were mumbling over the smooth surface in a fair semblance of a caress. Demetrius turned away, feeling physically faint, so repugnant was the sight of the satyr-like mouth approaching those perfect features. Crumpler continued to mutter to himself.

"And she knows secrets, too, eh, my beauty, don't 'ee? She smiles, look you, but she won't tell—not she! Well, well, let 'em gnash as they like, my dear! We know, don't we? We know!"

Demetrius spoke. His errand had come back into his mind again, but another question was burning on his tongue and, though he dreaded the answer, he needs must ask.

"And now that the bust is finished, Miss Trehane will be going away, I suppose, sir?"

The sculptor threw a sharp glance at him, and found the blood darkening his pale cheek.

"Why, so she will, I reckon—and a good riddance, damned little hussy! What's her going or staying to you, eh?"

"Nothing," Demetrius made shift to say.

"One less to do for, I'd ha' thought!"

"Of course," faltered the other. "But, for that matter, I'd sooner it was one of the gentlemen."

"Eh? At it again, are you? Which one?"

"Mr. Jermyn, sir."

"Ha! Why?"

"Perhaps," Demetrius answered slowly, "I may be better able to tell you presently. I came for the key of the keeping-room, sir."

Grumbling a little at him for his obstinacy, Crumpler produced it, and Demetrius turned away. His master, still gloating over his exquisite Flora, called after him:

"Now I've finished the bust we'll get on with the Prometheus. I've a new way of making the muscles stand out. We'll get to work this morning."

Demetrius went away with a tightening of the lips, and unlocked the door of the living-room. In a couple of paces he had reached the table and running his hand along the inside ledge found his fingers close upon the missing card. As he had suspected, so Jermyn had secreted it during the game, and, apparently, had not dared to remove it afterwards owing to the presence of the rest. Crumpler himself occupied the necessary position at the subsequent meal, and any undue attempt to oust his

host from his place would have awakened suspicion—so at least the culprit might reasonably fear. Doubtless, Jermyn had thought the hidden card sufficiently well concealed until he found a favourable opportunity of removing it.

Leaving it where it was, Demetrius went to the door and called his master. When Crumpler came, he led him to the table and said: "You were angry with me, sir, last night, for accusing Mr. Jermyn of cheating."

"What business o' thine was it to speak against my son's friend?"

"It's the business of every faithful servant to protect his master's interests."

"H'm! Well?"

"If Mr. Jermyn had held the Knave he ought to have played it—which would have lost him the game and a certain sum of money."

"How do ye know aught about the game?" asked Crumpler with bent brows. "'Tis the man's own making, I understand. How came ye to spout the rules so pat?"

"I don't know, sir. I only know that I could follow every detail of the play."

"Do 'ee know the man?"

"I can't tell you that either. I wish to Heaven I could! But I know him for a rogue and a swindler, and here's my proof. Put your fingers under the table, sir, just below here, and see what you will find."

Still frowning, Crumpler obeyed, and drew out the missing card. For half a minute he held it between his fingers, glancing from it to the triumphant Demetrius. Then he asked:

"Did ye put it there yourself?"

"How could I do that, sir? I never handled the cards, as you know. If it had been where Mr. Jermyn declared it was it would have been destroyed with the rest."

"That's so," said the sculptor, and mused awhile. Then he caught up his stick and turned to the door.

"Well, sir?"

"I'll talk to him," said Crumpler shortly. He was quivering with inchoate rage. "Ha'ye seen the man about?"

Before Demetrius could reply that he had not, a footstep was heard upon the uncarpeted stairs, and Drenchard came into view. Had it been Jermyn himself, Demetrius, knowing to some extent of what the man was capable, would have remained. Of

Drenchard as a tool in the other's hands, he knew little, although he fully expected him to side with his friend. But assuming that no danger was to be apprehended, and regarding the impending interview as a private affair, he moved away as soon as the first heated words burst from his master's lips.

XXVII

A SEARCH AND A FINDING

"WHAT the devil's the matter now?" asked Drenchard as he reached the bottom stair. "Lost a fourpenny-bit, one might think, by the noise you're making."

"Ay!" shrieked the old man, rapidly working himself up into one of those furies which, while they lasted, held more than a touch of madness in them. "A fourpenny-bit, and more besides, my boy! Gone into the pockets o' thy fine friend, along with your own coin. But I'll have it back—I'll have every farthing of it back, burn me if I don't! Where's the man, I say? The damnation scoundrelly rogue!"

Drenchard, beginning to understand what was in the wind, stuck his hands in his pockets and lounged against the stairpost frowning. So Jermyn had been cheating after all. And the old man, somehow, had discovered it. Then he recalled Demetrius leaving Crumpler's side at the moment when he himself came into view. He made the accusation at once.

"That's Demetrius again, I suppose," he said.

"Never you mind, Silas, never you mind who 'tis. Demetrius is a good lad. Looks after his master's interests, he do, and he be a rare en to work. Leave Demetrius alone! 'Tis that fine gentleman friend o' yours that I want to see."

"What for?"

"'Cos he've a-been cheating the pair of us, my boy, and not another hour do he stay in the house—no, by God, not another hour!"

"Stop a bit," said Drenchard. "Don't get so excited. Let a fellow think—do!"

"Think?" Crumpler yelled, waving his fists in the air. "Don't need much thinking, I reckon. The man's a cheat, a scoundrel, and you'm no better if you go to take his part!"

Drenchard stamped his foot angrily and clapped his hands over his ears.

"Hold your tongue, you old rattle-pate," he ordered insolently. "Let me think."

But in spite of his stamping and abuse he was forced to do his thinking with his stepfather clamouring wildly in his ears.

Drenchard found himself now in much the same dilemma as that which had pinned him on the previous evening. He knew well enough that in order to gratify his greater cupidity he must be content to let the lesser remain unsatisfied. In a word, to break with the unscrupulous card-player meant that he must forego the assistance which his scheming friend had promised. And, although Drenchard still timidly hoped that the greater villainy might be dispensed with, he was far from desiring to throw up the infamous business altogether. Called upon to decide at a moment's notice whether he would resent Jermyn's nefarious attack upon his pocket and lose the profit of his friendship, or relinquish his rights at the card-table in order to possess a bulging purse later on, he chose the immediate loss for the sake of the subsequent gain. But, although this decision necessitated his defence of his friend, he was too sore at the thought of having been cheated of even a small sum to be any sweeter in temper for the expedient.

"You're doing my friend a wrong," he said in a tone which even the excited man at his side recognized as insincere. "Jermyn wouldn't cheat at cards: he's too much of a gentleman."

"What? You take his part against me, do you?" Crumpler screamed in answer.

"'Tisn't a question of taking sides, you old fool! The man's my friend——"

"And ben't I your father?"

Drenchard looked his contempt.

"You're no blood of mine."

"I'm your stepfather, ben't I?"

"Worse luck for me," muttered the younger man, trying to slip past.

"What? Why, you ungrateful cub, han't I done more for 'ee than your own father ever did?"

"Leave my people alone! They were gentlefolk, not miserly plaster images like you."

"Eh? Ben't I a thousand score better 'an all the gentry in the land? Ben't I a man o' genius? How many o' your kin

on t'other side can show a man o' genius for all their quarterings ? Answer me that ? "

" A deal of good your genius has done me," Drenchard retorted savagely. He was ready, under his conflicting provocations, to throw off the thin skin of respect which he had hitherto worn.

" What's that you say ? God damn me, but han't I made a gentleman of you ? Why, you'd naught but a shirt and a pair o' darned breeches when your mother brought you here ! "

" I've got to work for my living like any damned linen-draper's assistant—I know that ! "

" Work's good for 'ee. And I'm not a rich man."

" I've heard that before," Drenchard sneered.

" 'Tis God's truth ! " protested the old sculptor, his hands clawing the air. " But the little I've got was to ha' been yours when I'm gone."

Drenchard noted the conditional phrasing, and stood up sharply enough.

" If you've got anything to leave you're hanging on to it for a devilish long while," he remarked. " Why don't you hook off and let me have my rights ? "

" What ? " The sculptor's face was as white as one of his own marble busts, and his hands were mere contortions of rage. " Want me to die, do 'ee ? Is that it, eh ? "

Drenchard threw discretion to the winds that sang everlastingly around the Tower. He was desperate with greed, alarm and anxiety, dreading lest he had already gone too far, yet without either the desire or the self-control to refrain from making his case blacker still.

" Want you to die ? " he repeated deridingly. " Why, I've wanted that for years ! What right has an old bag of bones like you to go on living so long ? Thought I was fond of you, did you ? I've hated the sight of your miserable old carcase as long as I've known it ! That's the truth, and you can make what you like of it—damned if I care ! Now get out of my way."

He pushed recklessly past the old man, who by this had become inarticulate with rage, and, his small eyes shooting venom at the kinsman who had ever been a friend to him, made for the open air. Crumpler, blind with fury, hurled a curse after him. Then he suddenly collapsed in a heap on the bottom stair.

Here, a moment later, Demetrius found him, barely conscious,

purple of visage, and breathing heavily. He raised the prostrate figure, and sat at his master's side, holding him in his arms for a quarter of an hour, while the old man gradually recovered to a certain extent. His breathing became easier by degrees and presently the abnormal colour left his face, which then showed drawn and wan. As soon as his intellect reasserted itself, he began to mutter maledictions against the stepson who had revealed his true character to the man who, whatever his own failings, had at least been blind hitherto to those of the younger man.

Demetrius, gathering from the disjointed sentences that a quarrel of some violence had occurred, helped his master back into the sitting-room, and applied such simple restoratives as he was able to lay his hands on. Crumpler lay at length more at ease, watching Demetrius as he moved about the room. Presently he spoke in a quieter tone:

"I thought I was gone that time," he said, and gave a croaking laugh.

Demetrius came to his side. To his surprise Crumpler caught hold of his hand and pressed it feebly.

"You'm a good lad, Demetrius Jordan; a good lad. You've served me well on the whole, and I'm not a man that's easily pleased."

"I have tried to serve you, sir. God knows if I've succeeded!"

"As for them two, they shall pack—bag and baggage, out they go to-day! A pair of scoundrels, Demetrius; a lying cheating pair of scoundrels."

"I always knew it of Mr. Jermyn, sir."

"Jermyn? The man's a rogue, but, at his worst, he's no kin of mine. I didn't ever feed his carcase with the bread I ill could spare. I didn't pinch and pine to make him a gentleman. I didn't work my old fingers when they should ha' been resting to scrape together the money that should set him at his ease before he was half my age. No, no; t'other's the blackest scoundrel of the two."

"Don't excite yourself, sir."

Presently Crumpler fell into a doze. Demetrius stood looking at him, and at this moment, had his mind been in its former introspective humour, might have learned something to add to his growing store of knowledge about himself.

For, although this man had been a hard, even a rough master

to him, inconsiderate and eminently unsympathetic, he now found his own heart touched into a sensibility at the position of one whose affection had been so violently outraged. Pity for the stricken man, so near his mortal end, moved him as he looked ; pity, and a kind of rugged respect which he had never yet known, for Crumpler helpless and deserted had manifested an odd sort of dignity which Crumpler the believer in his own genius and vigour had never possessed. Demetrius went softly away, another humanizing influence flowing through a heart that opened to it gladly. Relief was his also ; less on his own account, although the personal element was bound to come in, than on Crumpler's own. He had marked with intense satisfaction his master's determination to rid himself of Jermyn's dangerous presence.

He made his way into the open air. The hour was still early, and lovely with freshness of delicate golden light and green shade. The trees were still at their thickest leafage, umbrageous and undespoiled. The season stood midway between the earlier nuances of long days and cool nights, and the mellowness of a heavier atmosphere and intenser colouring. It was maturescent, rich in promise, growing towards the zenith of the year, which, in the quiet advance of its perfection, seemed already to be lifting sun-tanned hands to grasp its crown of plenty and goodness.

Demetrius walked towards his favourite spot by the river and sat down clasping his work-roughened hands around his knees. Below him ran the cool dark water, reproducing as in a sepia wash the overhanging roots and branches, with darker stains where patches of moss and lichen failed to catch and hold the rays of the level sun. Before him was the conical mound in the cavity of which he had lain as dead before Robert Crumpler's hand had brought him back to life. In moments of depression or rebellion he had schooled himself to that subduing thought. Life, and all that this poor broken existence of his held, for so much had he to thank the sculptor, Robert Crumpler.

Oh, the bitter-sweet of loving her ! Oh, the empty useless love that might never be crowned with service, that held no promise of attaining to love's divinest attitude of sacrifice, but must needs sit humbly in the dust, blessed only by the passing of her shadow before she was gone ! Would he, if it was possible so to betray himself, cast out of his heart this smart and pain, that mocked him with its obverse side which bore a crown of joy ? Would he have one pang the less, one jealousy, one yearning

desire, even one little bitter stab of self-condemnation, which the loss of his love might give? Would he gain ease by so much loss? At three-and-twenty years of age, with a bitter experience behind him and a hopeless future before, he told himself that he would not. A foolish fancy took him that his love itself might become purified, more worthy of the acceptance for which he would never plead, by the very pain which it engendered, and by which, in truth, it seemed to live.

And, in thinking of his love and all that it meant, he leant back against a tree-trunk with closed eyes and presently lost all count of time in a dreamless sleep.

He was awakened some time later by a touch on his shoulder, and looked up to find Josian standing over him. He shook the sleep from his eyes and scrambled to his feet; tongue-tied at the recollection of his last waking thoughts, and yet vaguely alarmed, for she was grave beyond her wont, her grey eyes luminous and questioning.

"Demetrius, is anything wrong? Where has my uncle gone?"

"Gone, miss, gone? I didn't know—— Good heavens! how neglectful of me to fall asleep! I left him in his chair in the keeping-room."

"Well, he's not there now. I looked in for breakfast and found the room quite empty."

"Oh, miss, I am sorry! I——"

"That doesn't matter. But what's happened, Demetrius? My cousin and Mr. Jermyn are quarrelling uproariously in the studio, and my uncle has just taken the road in that queer-looking chariot of his."

"Taken the road?" cried Demetrius. "Gone out, do you mean?"

It was the first time since his own occupation that his master had left the grounds.

Josian nodded.

"Of course that's what I mean. Don't be stupid, Demetrius! I thought you might understand. I didn't care to ask the others, so I woke you up."

"And I'm very glad that you did, miss. I ought never to have left him. I must go after him at once."

"I'll come with you," Josian said quickly. "I don't fancy being left alone with that wrangling pair. Where will you go?"

"To the village, I suppose. Barjona may know something."

They crossed the garth side by side, walking rapidly, she with her youthful elasticity and splendid carriage, he with a new firmness and air of resolution; she in her unsoiled feminine fripperies; he in his stained jacket and threadbare breeches. She, glowing and radiant; he, worn and experienced before his time. Said Josian as they hurried along:

"I never knew him leave the place before—yet I've often wondered at the odd old chaise."

"You saw him go away?" Demetrius asked, trying to fix his mind on his runagate master and not on the dear warm presence by his side.

"Yes. He was driving through the gateway when I caught sight of him. He must have harnessed the thing himself."

"I wish you could have stopped him," said Demetrius uneasily.

"Why?"

"Because he ought not to have gone out alone. He is not well to-day."

"He was very well yesterday; particularly so, being so very well pleased that the bust is finished."

They had reached the gatehouse. The doors stood loosely on their hinges.

"It wasn't like him to leave the gate unlocked," Josian remarked as Demetrius pushed one door open for her.

"No," he answered as they came into the roadway. "But, as I told you, Miss Trehane, he was not himself this morning."

"In what way?"

Demetrius made no reply. He was staring down at the ground. Few vehicles passed the entrance to the Abbey, and the summer dust lay thick in the roadway. Interspersed with the broad tracks made by the recent passage of Barjona Furmedge's wheels there now appeared a set of narrower impressions less clearly defined, but running in the same direction.

"Right!" exclaimed Demetrius, pointing to these. "He has gone to the village."

Man and maid then set off down the long straight road in pursuit of the old man. In the far distance appeared a small speck which might have been the object of which they were in search, but which was too far off to hold out any hope of their overtaking it. Still, Demetrius pushed on, and soon Josian was half a pace behind.

" Don't rush along so," she said rather petulantly. " I can hardly draw my breath."

He slackened his steps for a minute, but then found himself forging ahead again.

" Of course, if you'd sooner go alone——" began the girl.

" I'm sorry, miss. I forgot. But I really am anxious about Mr. Crumpler."

Josian twisted her red lips ruefully.

" You'd better go on, then. I'll wait here. I daresay I'll be quite safe. I don't suppose Mr. Jermyn will follow. It was just about here that he—tried to kiss me."

Demetrius's face flamed. Josian noted that before she dropped her eyes to her dainty shoes.

" You mustn't run that risk, Miss Trehane. As long as we keep the chaise in view, I've no doubt we shall do very well."

The walk proceeded, but now the order was reversed. Josian involuntarily led, for Demetrius had dropped a couple of paces behind. The travelling chaise was rapidly diminishing before their gaze. Josian frowned at it for some time in silence. Then she addressed her companion over her shoulder.

" Still, if he—Mr. Jermyn, I mean—should follow me, you wouldn't be much protection, would you, Demetrius ? "

" I don't think he would try to kiss you, miss, if I was by."

" H'm ; I'm not so sure."

" At least, he'd not succeed. Of that I'm certain."

" Your voice sounds very positive. What makes you so sure ? "

" If he did try, I should knock him down at once."

Josian sprang round.

" You would ? You'd dare to knock down a gentleman in this dusty road ? "

" If he insulted you, I would."

Josian glanced along the way they had come.

" I'm afraid he's not following," she said with a laugh.

" So much the better, I should think, Miss Trehane."

" Demetrius, you forget your position ! Why do you think it's better for Mr. Jermyn not to follow us ? "

" For several reasons, miss."

" Tell me one ? "

" I thought you didn't like him."

" I hate him," Josian said calmly. " Anything else ? "

" I don't want him to meet my master."

" Why not ? "

"Because——"

"For Heaven's sake, come alongside, do! It gives me a crick in the neck talking to you sideways."

"I thought you——"

"Lor', Demetrius, never mind what you thought!" cried the girl as he joined her. "Something wrong, I'll swear. Now, please, go on about my uncle."

He told her briefly what had occurred to his knowledge, and what he surmised to have happened afterwards. Josian listened with interest untouched by his own anxiety. When he had ended, she walked along in silence. She was wondering what effect a quarrel between her uncle and his stepson would have upon her father's affairs.

Demetrius studied her profile. The soft brim of her hat flapped in the light breeze and gave him now a full contour, now only a partial view. The masses of her brown hair, waving back on either side of her forehead to fall into little natural ringlets over her ears, caught the sunlight and revealed unsuspected shades of old gold. Her cheek was pinker than usual and the quick walking had parted her lips and given a deeper swell to her bosom. Once a ribbon at her waist flew out upon the air and gently flicked his hand like a caress.

"Miss Trehane," he said at length, impelled to speech because this silent scrutiny was growing unendurable, "is it true that you will be going away soon?"

She turned to him with a startled look; his words had fitted in with her own reflections.

"Going away?" she repeated. "Well, yes; I suppose so. Why do you ask, Demetrius?"

"For one reason, because I think you will do well to go away. The house, with those two men in it, is no place for you."

"Pooh!" retorted Josian bravely. "I'm not afraid of Mr. Jermyn. Is he following yet?"

"Thank God, no!"

"How emphatic you are! I wonder why? Yes, I shall probably be leaving soon. Not that it can make any difference to you, of course."

Demetrius's face might have been one of Crumpler's marble busts as he answered her:

"No. It can't, as you say, make any difference to me."

Josian glanced sideways at him. Then her head went up.

"You're only my uncle's servant, of course," she remarked

icily. "Still, I would have thought it might have made—a little difference."

Another ray of luminous grey light was shot into his face. He clenched his hands and walked steadily on.

"Won't it—Demetrius?"

"Yes," he burst out suddenly, "yes, miss, just a little. There'll be one less to do for after you have gone, you see."

Josian gasped. Then she recovered herself, her heart smarting more keenly than her burning cheek.

"Oh," she said shortly, "of course, if you choose to look at it like that, I've no doubt you're right."

"I do choose to look at it like that!" cried the despairing young man at her side. And there was that in his voice which sent her hurriedly to the other side of the road, where she leant against the bank, palpitating with half a dozen different emotions.

He loved her. She knew that now as certainly as if his tongue had declared it to her in set words. True, the notion was not a new one, but this sudden unmistakable conviction took her with the force of a revelation, humbled her, and cast an inner ray of light upon her own conduct. What if he, who must have been weighing every word and every gesture of hers, had misread her open advances, given heedlessly indeed, but with full sincerity out of her own growing sentiment towards him, for the mere caprices of an idle young woman who deemed her position a sufficient safeguard to her own peace of mind? She grew confused at the thought; the more so because it was apparent that he had enough respect, either for himself or for her, not to take advantage of the barefaced openings which she had given him.

The situation, she found, was intolerable; a circumstance which should have taught her the strength and depth of her own feelings, but which she was too agitated to examine. She searched her mind for some immediate remedy, and found none. To go farther in her encouragements was impossible, once this distorting thought of his probable failure to appreciate her sincerity had come to her. At any rate, she felt incapable now of doing a single thing to unravel the tangle, lest it should grow more. With the curious complexity of love she almost hated him for having placed her in such a position. Yes, that was it! He loved her, but he thought her a common flirt, and this was his way of telling her so. To love, and yet to despise the object of one's love seemed a strange combination, she thought, but

men, she had somewhere read, were able to do that—women, never.

Meanwhile, Demetrius had his own interpretation of her sudden change of manner.

"I have shown her the truth," he told himself miserably, "and I have offended her. I have destroyed the one thing that I had: her friendship."

Then—it was barely a minute after his sturdy refraction from the truth—Josian spoke, schooling herself to a studied coolness of tone:

"I think that I will not go to the village, after all. I am a little tired. I will wait here until you find my uncle and bring him back."

Demetrius, cursing his lamentable lack of control, moved towards her. He was at a loss what to say. In such matters his darkened memory, by robbing him of any experience of the world which might have been his by actuality or hearsay, was a drag anew upon him.

"Don't you understand?" cried Josian sharply. "I'm not coming any farther. Oh, you needn't be afraid to leave me, you trusty servant, you! I'm quite safe here. See! there's an elderly respectable farmer within hail. And I don't suppose," she added with a little bubble of nervous laughter, "no, I really don't suppose that he'll want to kiss me!"

Demetrius walked on without a word. Josian watched him long and earnestly.

When it was quite certain that he did not intend to look back, she threw herself face downwards on the bank, and let the pent-up tears water the speedwell and campions at her side.

"Oh, I've hurt him, I've hurt him with my hateful temper!" she sobbed. "I've hurt him—and he loves me; yes, in spite of everything he loves me as dearly as—as I love him!"

XXVIII

CRUMPLER ATTENDS TO BUSINESS

WHEN Robert Crumpler awoke from the half comatose state into which he had fallen his brain was singularly clear and active. His physical condition was less satisfactory, but after one or two efforts he was able to rise and to walk uncertainly towards the door.

There he paused. From the direction of the studio came the sound of voices raised in angry altercation. He recognized them as those of his stepson and Jermyn. Rage filled him anew. He shook both his fists in the air and cursed under his breath.

He wanted Demetrius—wanted him at once—yet dared not lift his voice to summon him lest those two should be drawn from their own concerns and come out to hinder the work which he had in hand. That that work must be carried through in secret seemed a point absolutely essential to his purpose.

He stood a moment in thought, peering doubtfully along the passage past the half-closed door of the studio in the direction of the kitchen regions. There was no sign that he could detect that might indicate the presence of his servant. Very cautiously he crept from the room, but instead of turning towards the inner part of the house he made his way to the front door. It stood ajar, and he slipped out into the open air without attracting the attention of the men within.

Here, again, he was obliged to pause. His legs were shaky and his breath came in short painful gasps. Had he dared a return he would have been grateful for a draught of the cordial which he had left behind. As it was, he resumed his progress as soon as he could, and walked slowly in the direction of the stable.

He wanted a message taken to the village at once, and since Demetrius, almost for the first time, was not at hand when wanted, Crumpler had fixed his mind on going himself. It was nearly three months since he had left the house, not, in fact,

since his momentous visit to Sir John Trehane's official residence, when he had abstracted the reprieve. And nothing but the direst necessity, or what he conceived to be such, would have induced him to take even so trifling a journey as the one he now intended.

He swung open the stable door and leading the solitary nag between the shafts of a dusty vehicle contrived with much exertion and many pauses to harness it to the equipage. This conveyance was of no known design or make, but more nearly resembled an ancient Roman chariot than anything else, the similitude being greatly heightened when the old sculptor, in his scarlet toga-like costume, took his place in the body of the vehicle and drove it towards the gateway at a smart pace. The chariot contained no seat, and before long Crumpler, who usually drove standing, was forced to rest himself against the curved side of the car, and to let the horse proceed as it would, unchecked and unguided. As the animal was strong and fresh, it set off at a hand-gallop. The chariot rocked and creaked behind it, the old man rolled about helplessly and, finally abandoning his position, sank down at the bottom of his carriage, only retaining sufficient mastery over the horse to enable him, when at length the long road had been covered, to turn the whole concern into the village street instead of allowing it to career wildly towards the open country.

The sight of Robert Crumpler in his odd equipage was rare but not unfamiliar to his rustic neighbours, and his appearance now only excited comment on account of his frail and exhausted aspect. He was on his feet again now, asking with some anxiety whether Barjona Furmedge had yet left his home. On learning that he had not, he proceeded to the tranter's cottage.

He found the worthy man at his breakfast, and unfolded his business at once.

"You be going to Dorchester to-day?" he asked, falling, as was his habit, much into the tranter's own way of speech.

Furmedge, somewhat confused by the old sculptor's visit, nodded assent.

"Well, I'm wanting a message taken."

"Very good, sir. Who to?"

"Mr. Thomas Ridley, the lawyer. I want him to come up to the Tower so soon as he may—to-morrow, if he can. Anyhow, there's no time to be lost. I'm a-going to alter my will."

Furmedge heard this important announcement without change

of expression. The vagaries of gentry-folk were beyond surprise. Moreover, he was not the man to set much store by worldly gear. He went on munching his hunk of bread, and merely nodded again.

"Ay; 'tis come to that. Not a groat o' my hard saved money shall go to that cursed rapscallion as I've nourished and kep' like a gentleman till now. I've a-found en out at long last, Barjona, an' be damned to him for an ungrateful and unnatural son!"

This change of front was sufficiently remarkable to provoke an interest that the mere remaking of a will had failed to arouse. Barjona chewed away in silence, digesting the news.

"He'm so vicious a young villain as ever wore out his welcome in an honest man's house!" cried Crumpler shrilly, his strength returning with his vivid appreciation of his wrongs. "He'm a viper as has stung me cruel! Wished me dead, he did, this very morning!"

"Nay, nay!" expostulated the kindly hearted tranter, but the deprecation only served to infuriate his visitor the more. He sprang from his chair, and, with eyes glowing wildly and grey hair floating in disorder about his convulsing face, burst forth into a venomous and well-nigh convincing tirade against the man who had so brutally outraged his heart and pocket alike.

Furmedge listened and watched with growing alarm. Even to him, who knew nothing of the attack earlier in the day, it was apparent that such an access of excitement was dangerous in a man of Crumpler's years and habitually quiet life. He had no vulgar curiosity to learn the details of the quarrel, his simple nature being inexpressibly shocked both at the depravity of the young man as set forth by Crumpler and at the virulence of the sculptor's denunciation. At length he made an attempt to stem the tide of the other's ravings by leading him back into a more practical channel.

"An' so you be goen to leave your goods an' all them fine statutes o' yours away from young Meäster Silas?" he suggested with gentle artfulness.

"I'm going to leave 'em all, save the works of art, to Demetrius!"

"Ah!"

Furmedge leant over the fire and raked it thoughtfully.

"Ha' ye got an reason on why I shouldn't?" demanded Crumpler fiercely.

"Me? Oh, naught, naught at all, sir. 'Tes a very noble deed on your part, I'm sure."

"Ah; but the lad's been a good lad to me, Barjona. He's tried an' trusty, an' he's served me well."

"I han't a doubt o' that, sir."

"Very well, he shan't lack a reward. What he was afore he came to me's no concern o' mine. 'Twas a closed page so soon as he took service with me. He's dealt fair by me, an' I'll deal square by him. Got aught against that, Barjona?"

"Not a word, sir. 'Tes the Lard's own way o' dealen wi' us poor martals, I reckon. And that's what you'll be needen the law for, then?"

Crumpler nodded. He had become calmer, but his appearance still gave the honest tranter cause for alarm.

"Sit 'ee down, sir, an' finish theäse drap o cider."

"You'll fetch the lawyer along, 'Jona—take my message as I tell 'ee?"

"Ay, sir. Lardy now, I wish ye had a better colour in your feäce. 'Tis arl scrammed like."

"Let be, 'Jona," Crumpler protested petulantly. "There's naught wrong, I tell 'ee. Hearken to what I say, or ye'll be forgetting half. The lawyer'll ride straight on to the Tower, but you must fetch along the witnesses."

"Where be I to find 'em, sir?"

Crumpler was silent, thinking for a few moments. He sat hunched up in his chair, and found some difficulty in concentrating his thoughts. Presently he said:

"You'll do for one. D'ye call to mind anyone else that can write his name in the village?"

"There's Podger, sir."

"No, no; he'm the biggest tatler in the place, and I don't want all the world to know."

"Why not ha' the gentleman as is stayen up to the Tower?"

"Him?" screamed Crumpler, all the worst symptoms of his frenzy returning at once. "Him as is hand in glove with t'other scoundrel? A pair of rakehells, I tell 'ee, and they'll be quit o' my house long before the lawyer gets there!"

"Now, now," soothed the tranter, "bide quiet, do! 'Twas a foolish thought o' mine. I see as he 'ouldn't do. Let I think! . . . What d'ye say to the widder lady, Mrs. Summerhayes, old Farmer Kellaway's darter as was? She, a nice quiet woman as holy Paul hisself couldn't ha' had no objection to."

" The woman that ran away to find a husband, and came back wi'out one, he he ! " commented the other, adhering to his old definition of the lady.

" Nay, nay ; 'tes a wicked scandal, I do b'lieve. She were wed so truly as you was, sir. Don't she wear a wedden ring ? No God-fearen 'oman 'ould do so without cause, I reckon."

" That's naught to me ! " retorted the old man with a flick of his fingers. " But I judge she'll do. She's no talker ; that I'll allow. Fetch her along to-morrow so soon as the lawyer comes. You can settle about the time with him. But, mind, there's none to be lost."

Barjona, gravely regarding the drawn face and huddled figure of the speaker, mentally endorsed the last sentence. While he was looking, Crumpler broke in a low chuckle.

" Lord lordy," he gasped, " to think o' the disappointment of that rat-eared loon that thinks to grab it all, he he he ! "

Had the tranter been aware that the speaker had already confided the history of his unfortunate servant to his stepson, he, lighting on a point which had escaped the other's crazy wits, would have doubted the wisdom of giving that young man an interest in betraying the confidence. As it was, his simple heart rejoiced in the thought that Demetrius, either as a repentant and regenerate sinner or as an innocent sufferer for another's crime, should find peace and quietude at last.

While he was giving silent thanks according to his habit for what seemed a mercy vouchsafed to a fellow creature, Crumpler's vindictive cackle suddenly changed into a gasp. He struggled to his feet, beat the air for a moment with his clenched hands and then fell forward unconscious across the table. While the tranter was staring helplessly at the prostrate form, Demetrius himself rushed in.

Within an hour the old man had recovered sufficiently to be lifted into Barjona's cart and to make the return journey in that wise. He lay on a bundle of straw in the bottom of the cart, Demetrius crouching at his side, his hand clasped tenaciously by the withered fingers, and his heart strangely stirred by his master's new-born dependence on him.

When they reached the spot where Josian, in default of any better proceeding, was waiting for them, the cart was pulled up, and she climbed to the place alongside the tranter which her father had once occupied.

Burningly conscious of Demetrius's nearness, although the

curtain at her back shielded each from either, the girl sat stiffly gazing out from the hood of the cart with grave wide eyes. Something had come into her life, or something had gone out of it ; she could not be certain which. But a feeling of depression held her spirits, and she was nearer to unhappiness than she had ever been in her life before.

Soon she would be going away. Would he let her go and make no sign ? She feared that he might. And what, in the name of womanly modesty, could she do more ? Did he, indeed, misread her candour for flippancy ? Or had she misread him ? The remembrance of the moment of revelation assured her on this last point, but her very certainty drove her to the edge of anger with the object of her love.

Meanwhile, the cart jogged on. Furmedge rocked and jolted at her side, from time to time stealing glances at her absorbed face from beneath the rusty brim of his hat. Once or twice he attempted with rustic geniality to draw her into conversation. She answered at random, and fell afresh into silence. Presently Furmedge bethought himself of something. He pulled a letter from his side pocket, and held it towards her.

" Lard love 'ee, missy, what a stupid I be, to be sure ! 'Tes a letter as I got last night an' shoved into pocket to give 'ee this marnen, an' here be I forgetten to mind it."

Josian glanced down, recognized her father's writing, and took it eagerly. It was extremely short, and merely conveyed the intelligence that he would be at Dorchester on the Saturday next after date. He would stay at the *King's Arms*, where he ordered her to join him on the day afore-mentioned. She was not to inform her uncle or his stepson of his proximity. And so with a coldly affectionate message of regard to herself, the missive came to an end.

Josian sat thinking, with the letter in her hand, growing hot and cold by turns. Her position at the Tower after her emphatic rejection of Jermyn's addresses had been none too pleasant. To linger there in her present indeterminate attitude with regard to Demetrius Jordan would, she knew, be more intolerable still. Should she give him a last chance by intimating openly how close at hand the hour of her departure was ? Supposing, after that, he let her go and made no sign ? She shivered at the thought. After all, there was a touch of her father's proud and sensitive spirit in Josian Trehane.

Yet, to deny this silent lover of hers the opening for which he

might be waiting, with a wistful regret for his recent humility, opened up conjectures of a still more distressing nature. She knew well enough that, once their lives were parted, only a concatenation of events worthy to be termed a miracle could bring them together again, unless the meeting were deliberately planned on either side. But why wait for that ? If she must make another move, why not do it at once ? And yet. . . .

She hit at length upon a compromise, taking due precaution first in her rôle of obedient daughter.

" Barjona," she said, " please look in and ask how my uncle is."

The tranter thrust his head between the curtains, and she heard his hoarse whispering followed by a reply in Demetrius's quieter tones. Furmedge's head reappeared.

" He ben't no better, miss."

" Is he conscious yet ? "

" Nay, missy ; he've not a-got his wits back, the lad says."

Josian settled herself on the hard seat, her lips pressed firmly together. Then she took her future in her hands, or as much of it as she could manage.

" 'Tis very unfortunate, this illness of my uncle," she said, in clear penetrating tones calculated to carry behind the tarpaulin at her back. " You see, Barjona, I'm leaving to-morrow." Furmedge rubbed his nose, and looked ruefully at his horse's ears. " Yes ; my father's coming for me, so that I shall have to go."

" That's tar'ble onfortunit, miss. Be the gen'leman comen up-along to here? "

" To fetch me ? No. I'm to meet him at the *King's Arms* at Dorchester. Will you tell them to send a chaise up from the *Bear* for me ? To-morrow—that's only a very little time off now."

" Ah ! You be glad to go, missy ? "

Josian sighed. Realizing what that gentle suspiration implied she would have given one of her fingers to hear a similar sound on the other side of the curtain. But nothing reached her above the steady *clip-clop* of the horse's hoofs on the dusty road.

That Demetrius had heard she was fully assured by his manner when they reached her uncle's home. His assiduous attendance upon his master might have appeared natural enough, but there was no ostensible reason for his careful avoidance of her casual glances, nor for his firm and over-respectful refusal to allow her to assist in any way. Piqued, half-angry, wholly wretched, the

girl took herself off to the house, where she found Jermyn and Drenchard partaking of breakfast in gloomy silence. She told the younger man something of what had occurred and passed away to her own room.

The two whom she left behind eyed one another without speaking for a few moments. Then Jermyn moved to the window, and leaning out saw Furmedge and Demetrius carrying the old man between them towards the house.

"My dear Sly," he said, withdrawing his body and waving a hand in the direction of the small procession, "it appears to me to be providential."

Drenchard sprang up.

"Is he dead, then?"

"Hardly that. You go too fast, my boy. But there's no telling what may happen."

Drenchard dropped back into his chair.

"Pshaw! He may recover."

"He certainly may; if left alone."

"Curse you, what do you mean?"

"Haven't you ever heard of a process called assisting nature?"

"If that's in your mind, where the devil does your Providence come in?"

"How dull you are! You quarrelled with me and called me several ungentlemanly names just now, but it strikes me that I couldn't have facilitated your plans better if I had done it on purpose."

"Hanged if I see!"

"No? Doesn't it penetrate your particularly thick skull that, with the old gentleman in this precarious condition, your task, or rather Demetrius's, becomes simplified a hundredfold?"

"I suppose it does. . . . When are you going to tackle him again?"

"Time's up this evening."

"Why not at once?"

"You're impatient, Sly," said Jermyn with a quiet smile. "Because I prefer to do the tackling by night."

"You think he'll agree?" asked Drenchard, after a pause.

"I don't despair of persuading him. Now, not a word more on your life! Here they come. Play the penitent son as hard as you can and leave the rest to me."

XXIX

PROMETHEUS

AMID all the stress of the week's varying emotions Demetrius had not lost count of the time. He was well aware that the period of grace allotted by Jermyn would expire at sunset on this particular evening.

The hour was now rapidly approaching. He stood in the paved courtyard of the gatehouse, wondering what effect, if any, the recent developments would have upon his persecutor's plans. One result had already occurred. In spite of the old sculptor's vehement orders and declarations, neither Drenchard nor his friend had quitted the premises. Demetrius had not the authority nor the power to prevent this violation of his master's wishes. His own part had been performed with as much care and fidelity as if Robert Crumpler had never struck him a blow or given him a taunting word. But of necessity he had been allowed to take a very small share in the proceedings.

One thing he had done on his own initiative. By Barjona Furmedge he had sent a message to a physician in Dorchester, whose appearance he now momentarily expected. It was this anticipation that had drawn him from the Tower itself down to the gate, in readiness to admit the medical man when he should arrive.

Crumpler had passed the day for the most part in a state of torpor, but there had been intervals of consciousness when his mind was as keen and vigorous as usual. At such times, if he failed to find his servant at his side he had demanded his presence with all his wonted vehemence and insistency of purpose. And on Demetrius's appearance he had shown a satisfaction in his presence which the young fellow himself could only attribute to his abnormal condition, but to which he responded almost by instinct. When one of the others was also in the room, or in Demetrius's absence, Josian would come in and do her inexperienced part to the best of a warm-hearted woman's ability. But

Crumpler, in his waking moments, manifested as much distaste for her ministrations as he had comfort in those of Demetrius. This fact impressed itself upon them all.

The old man lay on an improvised bed in the studio, to which room he had been most conveniently carried. All around him stood the objects which his own hands had wrought—life-size busts and statues, bas-reliefs, delicate statuettes, masks and fragile carvings in ivory. Over his head the Flora smiled unceasingly, and in a corner Prometheus hung in frozen agony. It was to the bust that the old sculptor's eyes turned most often when his wits were alert and his vision clear. And the same lovely object held Demetrius's gaze whenever he could divert it from his master, and the fair original was absent from the room.

The western light was sending long shadows across the golden green of its own creating, and the murmurous hum of the leaves was lower than usual, when Demetrius quitted the house, leaving Josian and Drenchard in charge of the sick man. From early afternoon he had left the gate unlocked in readiness for the physician's arrival, but he was desirous if possible to speak a few words in private to him respecting the probable effect upon the patient of the continuous presence of the two men whose departure he had so earnestly desired. Already the discovery of this fact had led to trouble in the sick-room.

Demetrius opened the door and looked out. No one stood there. He walked to the turn of the road and sent an anxious glance down the long dusty by-way. Nothing stirred between himself and the limit of his vision. The noise made by the mill-race was the only sound that mingled with the evening songs of the birds. Dejected and troubled, he turned back to the Abbey, and upon stepping through the doorway found Jermyn standing where he himself had waited three minutes before.

The man met his glance with his usual mocking insolence.

"Hello, what are you doing there, my friend? Trying to bolt off? That your little game, eh?"

"If I thought of trying to run away from you," Demetrius answered steadily, "I shouldn't choose the time when my master is so helpless and at your mercy."

"Oh, trusty servant!" Jermyn stuck his hands into his pockets and laughed. He had a soft silky laugh, pleasant enough, apart from the manner that accompanied it. Then he glanced round.

" Hadn't you better fasten the door ? You were very particular to keep it shut the other day."

Demetrius closed it in silence.

" I meant, lock it. I thought your master liked it locked."

" As a rule he does. But the place is safe enough while I'm here."

Again Jermyn laughed.

" Any objection to its being locked ? " he asked.

" No," said Demetrius, after a pause, " I don't know that I have." And he turned the key in the lock, and replaced it on its nail. But he did so with the feeling that he was placing himself at a disadvantage with his present companion.

In what way he could not have told, but the feeling was there, and the look on Jermyn's face when he turned to him again intensified it to a painful degree.

" Does Mr. Crumpler want me ? " he asked in a matter-of-fact way.

" Not yet. He was asleep when I left. Miss Trehane is with him. Shall we go inside ? I've a word or two to say to you."

" As you please."

Demetrius spoke with an indifference which his beating heart belied. He turned and led the way into his living-room. Jermyn followed. " That's better," he said. " Now we're not likely to be interrupted. By the way, young man, there's one thing I don't like about you——"

" You're fortunate," said Demetrius quickly. " There's no single thing about you that I do like."

Jermyn frowned, but immediately recovered his superficial good humour.

" An excellent example of the very fault I was about to complain of," he cried. " Your manner, young fellow, is decidedly lacking in respect and it's a defect that for you own sake I'd recommend you to amend."

" There are two good reasons why I should do nothing of the sort," said Demetrius. " First, I wasn't always a servant, and I suspect that you know that as well as I do ; and, second, you forfeited all claim to respect from me—or from any man for that matter !—at our last interview."

" Upon my soul, that's passably good for a half-hanged criminal like you ! If it wasn't so amusing I'd have a third reason in the the hollow of my hand for you—one that would effectually smash

your two! But sit down, you insolent scoundrel, and listen to what I've got to say."

Demetrius took up his former position on the stool by the table, but Jermyn took care this time to get between him and the door. Then they looked at one another as duellists might before they engage.

"You must be brief if you want an attentive listener," Demetrius said. "I must get back to my master soon."

"I've no wish in the world to keep you from him," Jermyn replied with the air of one who has been given a satisfactory opening. "On the contrary, you shall return to him as fast as you please after I've done. At the same time, this assumed attachment of yours is all cant and pretence. You cannot have much affection for a man who——"

"Mr. Crumpler gave me a home when I had none," Demetrius interrupted. "He helped me in my need. I am grateful for that."

"And for the floggings and insults?" Jermyn sneered. "Come now, give your pious tongue play."

"I don't wish to discuss my master with a stranger."

"It's not a case of what you wish, young man."

"Very well; I don't mean to discuss Mr. Crumpler with you. Perhaps you prefer me to put it so."

"Have a care! I warned you just now. You're growing insolent again."

"This interview isn't of my seeking, Mr. Jermyn."

"That's true! Well, let's come to the point. Have you thought of what I said to you a week ago?"

"I've thought of it several times. It made too great an impression for me to forget it easily."

"That's promising. Well?"

"Well?" repeated Demetrius, meeting his crafty look boldly.

"You say you've thought it over. I hope you see your position in its real light?"

"I said I had thought of your proposals and threats; I haven't, as you put it, thought them over. And I see my own position neither more nor less clearly than I did a week ago."

"H'm! That means, I suppose——"

"That my answer to you now is precisely the same as it was before."

Demetrius rose as he spoke as though the interview might be considered at an end. Jermyn caught his arm and forced him back again. His expression had changed ; the smile was wiped away, the eyes were darkly threatening.

" Wait, you damned fool ! Listen to me. I've got you in the hollow of my hand—like that ! And you know it. I'm going to use you. You'll do what I want, or you'll hang a second time. Oh, that makes you wince, does it ? Well, here's another thought to set you squirming still more. You're in love with——"

" No ! " cried Demetrius, his eyes blazing. " Not on your lips ! I'll not hear her name on your lips ! If you speak her name I'll strike you as you struck me the other day ! "

Jermyn drew back, his handsome face flushed with rage. But his cool head saved him from reducing what he intended to be a calculating interview, with a dash of logic thrown in, into a vulgar brawl at the outset. He wiped his heated forehead, and recovered himself before his companion did.

" I'll concede the point, for the lady's sake," he said. " After all, she deserves better of her lover than to have her name tossed before a young ruffian like you. Still, your pretty little outburst points a pretty little moral. You wouldn't care for the nameless one to hear all your pretty little history, would you, now ? "

" I should think myself even less worthy than I am to have been looked at by her, if I bent to your will in order to retain her regard."

" Very flowery and heroic ! Let's come down to a commoner level. Since I first spoke to you things have changed for the better—distinctly for the better. Don't you see how ? "

Demetrius refused to reply.

" Curse your surliness ! " cried Jermyn.

He walked to the door, looked out, closed it, locked it, and slipped the key into his pocket. Then he returned to Demetrius, who had again risen to his feet.

" Sit down ! " Jermyn bade him. " There's nothing to be alarmed about—yet. Now attend. There's the old man lying in a helpless state. At anyone's mercy ; put it, at your mercy. There's a treasure of untold value hidden in the house. It's no use to him, or he wouldn't keep it stowed away. But it would be of use, of infinite use, to others. The old man may die. In which case, the treasure can be got at. But, on the other hand,

he may recover, and on my soul, he being apparently as hard as nails, I'm not at all sure he won't! And, in that case, you having already aroused his suspicious mind against an honourable gentleman, the treasure will undoubtedly remain wherever it is—no use to anyone. That's my statement of the case. Do you follow me?"

"Go on," said Demetrius with dry lips.

Jermyn lowered his voice to continue:

"And now I'm going to make a gentlemanly confidence—tell you a little piece of private information, in fact. I feel quite safe in doing so because soon after to-night you'll either be hiding for your life or you'll be comfortably lodged in Dorchester Gaol. And in either case you'll recognize the futility of attempting to blacken the character of an honest man. The fact, the dismal fact, is this. I'm most devilishly in need of ready money. Without it, life is a burden, a——"

"You needn't enlarge upon that," Demetrius struck in, in a hard voice. He was twisting his fingers tightly together beneath the table. "What do you want me to do? Say it as briefly as you can."

Misled, for all his experience, by the implied promise in the words, Jermyn proceeded almost cheerfully.

"This," he said. "Set yourself free from the old miser's tyranny, and enable us to get at his money and valuables at one and the same time. You're there alone with him. A squeeze of the throat does it; an extra pillow over his head instead of under it; a drop of something in his drink. Choose your own way, whichever you think easiest. Then you can bolt, and take a good chance of getting away. We shall be too busy to trouble about you. If any questions are asked, we'll swear that thieves broke in, and—what the devil! Why are you looking at me like that? What do you mean by it?"

The curious look of horror that lurked always with a more or less degree of intensity in the depths of Demetrius's eyes had suddenly become so dominant that it seemed a living force to give power to his halting words. He gripped the table with both hands, leaning heavily towards the tempter Jermyn as he spoke.

"You ask me to murder Mr. Crumpler? To kill my master, the man who has sheltered and protected me, who trusts me and needs me even now! To stain my hands with blood a second time—if it be a second time!—that you may steal what you have no right to touch? Why, if I agreed, I should deserve all

that I have suffered in this world and a thousandfold more in the world to come ! "

" Then I say you are a fool—a damned fool ! " cried Jermyn in a fury. " You've got to do it whether you like it or not ! Pretty time of day for you to pretend to be scrupulous—you, with your half-wrung neck, and sordid history ! Why, you infernal idiot, can't you see that you'll be serving yourself a damned deal more than anyone else ? You'll get rid of a brutal master, and shall walk out of the place with ten pounds in your pocket—and 'tis an honour to the old skinflint to rate his wretched carcase so high ! You shall go free, I say, free to do what you like and go where you please. Why, good God, man, what convicted murderer ever had an offer like that before ? The merest pickpocket would sell his soul for the chance I'm giving you ! "

" And I tell you," answered Demetrius, from whom all trace of fear had been swept away, " that if I was as certain of my own former guilt as I am that you are tempting me to one of the vilest deeds ever conceived by man I would still throw your offer in your face, and know you for the scoundrel you are ! "

" Perhaps you think that I've not the power to make you rue your folly in refusing ? "

" No. I don't doubt that for a moment. You've only to inform the authorities who I am, and they'll lay their hands on me at once."

" Then perhaps you're fool enough to fancy that I shan't go to that length ? If you think so, 'tis the fatalest error of your life. Your own sense ought to assure you that I've gone too far and told too much to leave you at large as an enemy. Come, now ! Put an end to this folly. I'm only asking a very simple thing of you. And, by God, if you don't agree, I'll stop your tongue from blabbing for ever ! How much is your neck worth to you—with the chance of Josian Trehane thrown in ? "

Before the words were well out of his mocking mouth Demetrius had leapt at him, and was bending him backwards, bearing him to the ground in the sudden flaming of his love and anger. Taken by surprise, Jermyn lost his balance in a moment, and was on the floor, with his assailant kneeling on him, before he was well aware of what was happening. Demetrius's hands were at his throat, and his heated and enraged young face so close to the fallen man's that the breath of either burnt the other's cheek.

" You villain ! " Jermyn made shift to mutter. " Would you murder me as you did Prothero ? "

The grasp on his throat relaxed, but Demetrius neither allowed him to rise nor did so himself.

" If a man might do murder and be guiltless," he gasped, " it would be on some such creature as you ! If I was ten times as vile as you would make me out to be, your last suggestion would still be an insult ! Listen a moment, and see if you can understand. If she came to me and offered me her priceless love I would turn away from her as long as any taint, any doubt, any suspicion, either in my own mind or in the minds of others rested on my blemished name. Now, ask yourself whether the thought of going to her with a known crime on my hands is likely to hold any temptation for me ! "

He got up from his knees, and watched Jermyn rise, without attempting any further violence. His anger seemed to have burnt itself away, leaving in its place a certain quiet dignity. Jermyn, on the other hand, was blazing with fury. He stood for a moment spitting out half-finished imprecations. Then, as a saner temper succeeded—and he was never the man to let his anger blind his judgment—he fell to dusting his soiled and disarranged clothes in silence, eyeing his companion from time to time with an evil look.

" Well," he said at length, " I've had enough of your pieties, my friend, for one bout. I won't argue with you any longer. After your rough handling my throat's not equal to it. But, thank the Lord, my arms are strong still. We must try what effect a little gentle discipline will have upon your obstinate spirit. You shall have the whole night to think over your sins, and I trust that in the morning you'll have come to the wise conclusion that one more or less won't make much difference."

He walked towards the door, taking the key from his pocket as he went. Thoughts darted like lightning through Demetrius's mind. It was evident now that his enemy had anticipated his refusal to commit the proposed crime, and had made his plans for that eventuality. Evident, too, that his accomplice, Drenchard, was near at hand. That violence of some sort towards himself was intended by these two was another point which admitted of no doubt. Demetrius rapidly considered his position. It was not a hopeful one. Two to one is a bad beginning for the minority. True, the hour was not late, but the

gateway was at some distance from the house itself, and even there might be found only a young girl and a sick man. There remained the chance of the doctor's arrival at the opportune moment. It was the most inspiriting possibility that Demetrius had to help him, but he could not blind himself to the fact that, having delayed his visit so long, there was no reason to expect the doctor at any given moment. Moreover, it was not to be supposed that Jermyn would allow the gate to be opened, and entrance by force was impossible. The only vulnerable point lay in the lane at the back of the Abbey grounds, where the hedge was thin and broken. But of this a stranger would know nothing, and could hardly be expected to brave the vigilance of the watch-dog if he did.

Quickly dismissing all such hopes of escape as fallacious and therefore dangerous, Demetrius threw his glance round the room in search of some weapon with which he might delay his enemies' immediate design. There was nothing suitable for his purpose. He groaned in spirit. He had certainly succeeded in overbearing Jermyn a few moments ago, but that had been due to the suddenness of the attack, and not to any superior strength on his side. Taken man for man, the advantage of such was undoubtedly with his adversary; and he could not forget that he would have two to deal with.

Two. Jermyn, who was now holding a pistol in his hand, flung back the door, and Drenchard stepped in. He already wore the air of a man convicted of a crime. And, in truth, he was now fairly committed to the deed, having, since the events of the morning, overcome the last remnants of a conscience which a life of selfishness and greed had left to him.

"Well?" he demanded in a surly tone, with a furtive glance at Demetrius.

"Oh, our young friend here is extremely unreasonable," Jermyn answered, falling at once into his usual cool flippancy. "He's on the pious lay; caught it from the Methody tranter, no doubt. He'd like to go round the country as the converted murderer, only we can't spare him at present——"

"Stop that!" growled Drenchard. "He looks a bit dangerous. What are you going to do?"

"What I proposed. We'll give him the opportunity for a little quiet reflection. Now then, you!" Jermyn swung round on his victim, and then turned quickly to Drenchard again. "Where s the girl?" he asked

"With—him. She won't leave till one of us comes back."

"Good." Jermyn addressed himself to Demetrius once more. "You understand the position, I hope. We're two to your one. There's no one at hand to prevent us doing what we like. No cries of yours, supposing you were allowed to cry out, could reach the house. No one is likely to pass outside; if anyone did, we shouldn't let him in. You're in our hands, absolutely and completely. Do you see that?"

Demetrius stiffened his muscles but would not reply. Jermyn went on in his light way:

"Not being entirely a fool you must see it. Very well. You are to come for a short walk with us into the woods."

"Why?" asked Demetrius, stubbornly resolved to give as much trouble as he could.

"You'll find out when you get there. Get on t'other side of him, Sly. Now—are you coming?"

"At your ordering? Certainly not."

"Let me warn you——"

"I'll not stir a step with you."

"Then we must employ force," said Jermyn with an air of regret.

"Very well. Employ it."

Drenchard slipped behind Demetrius and suddenly dealt him a violent kick at the back of the knee, which sent the young fellow sprawling to the ground. Before he could spring up, Jermyn had secured his arms and was holding them in a powerful grip. Drenchard drew a length of stout rope from a bag which he was carrying and set about twisting it tightly round Demetrius's ankles. When this was fastened, he handed over another rope to Jermyn, who immediately did the same by the wrists which he was holding. Then he tied a handkerchief over the gasping mouth, and stood up gazing down at the helpless figure, while he recovered his own breath.

What was to follow, Demetrius could not determine. The mention of the Abbey woods had suggested the river which ran through them. That his death was the object of the attack he could not believe. And looking from the insolent triumph of the one face above him to the surly animosity of the other, he knew that there were worse things.

"Now, Sly," said Jermyn, taking hold of the prostrate shoulders.

" Cover his eyes first," Drenchard muttered. " I can't stand his staring at me like that."

" Oh, certainly. Pass over your handkerchief. Yet they're very fine eyes, Sly ; a deal handsomer than your own little green peepers. Now, before we move, look out and see if the coast's clear."

Drenchard reporting that it was, Demetrius felt himself lifted from the floor and carried along. The cooler air touching his cheek and hands told him that they were in the courtyard outside. Then came a smooth passage—they were crossing the garth. After that his bearers' feet began to go stumblingly, and he knew that they had reached the broken and encumbered ground that lay farthest away from the gatehouse and Tower. The air grew cooler still, and he told himself that they were at the edge of the river. Here he half expected to be set down, but knew a moment later that his bearers had turned to the left and were following the bank of the river without crossing to the other side. Three minutes later the procession stopped, and he heard Jermyn say :

" This will do."

He was set upon his feet, his back supported against some solid substance which he guessed to be the broad trunk of a tree, and hands began to move about his body loosening the upper bonds. He began to struggle, and was struck in the face. By cautious degrees his arms were released, only to be extended backwards, the wrists being secured on either side as before. The solid substance was now between his body and his bonds. They had bound him to the tree.

" Now, my friend," said Jermyn's mocking voice in his ear, " you can pose as Prometheus to your heart's content, and I don't mind saying that 'twas the model yonder that put the notion into my head. Here you'll stay till morning light, and then, when the larks and thrushes are piping over your head, we'll have another talk, and I hope I'll find you grown more reasonable."

Powerless to speak, Demetrius shook his head with as much defiance as he could put into the gesture. His tormentor merely laughed.

" Come, Sly, we'd best be going back to the invalid, or Miss Trehane may be coming out to look for us."

The long grass covered the sound of their immediate departure, but a few moments later Demetrius's straining ears caught the

sound of their voices growing momentarily fainter. He was left alone in the silence and the coming night. He had no more hope of escape or rescue than he had of mercy on the morrow.

He bowed his head and prayed in his heart as Barjona Furmedge had taught him :

" O my God, I have accepted the suffering, give me the strength to bear it ! "

The air grew cool and damp, but the night was long.

. . . . . .

As Jermyn and Drenchard strolled back towards the house the air was troubled by a noisy clanging of the gate bell. Both men paused in their tracks, and threw apprehensive glances in the other's face.

Jermyn raised the finger of silence. The bell sounded again.

" You're expecting no one ? " questioned the elder man in a whisper.

Drenchard shook his head.

" It may be Furmedge," he muttered.

" Well, we don't want him here."

" No, but—if anything happens, folks will think it queer we didn't admit him."

" Fudge ! If anything happens, it will be through Matravers. He'll get the blame therefore. Come on ! It's his place to attend to the gate. If he's too lazy to go, we can't help it."

He hooked his arm through his companion's, and drew him on to the house. The physician from Dorchester rang once again, then swore vehemently and rode away.

Josian rose up from her uncle's bedside as the two men entered. She crossed the room to meet them.

" Where is Demetrius ? " she inquired at once. " My uncle seems a little better and has been asking for him."

" Demetrius ? " Jermyn answered easily. " Oh, I've sent him down to the village for some physic. He'll be back directly. We'll stay here till he comes. Miss Trehane, I entreat of you to go to your room and get some rest."

This Josian, provided that her uncle did not need her, was not unwilling to do. And the fact remained that the old man in his conscious moments was fretful and uneasy in her presence.

" You will let me know if your father becomes worse ? " she said to Drenchard on her way out.

He replied in his usual ungracious way :

" I'll let you know. But it isn't likely. He's better, as you say."

At a sign from Jermyn he followed the girl from the studio, crept after her to the door of her room, heard her lock it, and softly drew a small strong bolt at the foot, which he himself had fitted in her absence during the day.

XXX

SOLUTION

WHEN the morning light filtered in through the uncovered windows and glazed roof of the studio it was plain to the man at the bedside that Josian's implied prediction of the previous evening was not to be discredited. Robert Crumpler was likely to recover ; if he was not to do so, means must be employed. Late at night he had fallen into an uneasy slumber, and during the cool dark hours the fever had subsided. His pulse was still feeble but its beat steady ; his face had lost much of its unhealthy pallor.

He was still sleeping when Drenchard rose and stole over to a corner where Jermyn lay under the shadow of Prometheus. He shook him and whispered a few words in his ear.

" No more than I expected ! " the other muttered sleepily. " What's the time ? "

" Just past three."

" Too early to do anything ! Too deliciously sleepy to think ! Besides wouldn't like to disturb Matravers just yet—he might be asleep too ! Wonder how he feels, ough ough ! "

And with a lazy yawn he turned over and went to asleep again. Drenchard, with a muttered oath, walked away. To him had fallen the whole of the night duty, and he was none the better in temper for the uneasy dozes which his shrinking conscience, grown a little more assertive in the night watches, had allowed him.

Three hours later Jermyn woke in earnest, and on examining the patient endorsed his friend's opinion. Crumpler had awakened and fallen asleep several times in the interim. He was sleeping now with a normalness about his aspect which set Jermyn's face in determined lines. He drew Drenchard out of the studio.

" Now," he said, when he had made a hasty toilet—for he was not the man to appear at the disadvantage of ruffled hair and

disordered dress even when a crime was afoot—" you'd better go and unfasten Miss Trehane's door ; she'll be coming down directly, I presume. If she does, and finds the old man alone, understand that Matravers deserted his post. Perhaps he grew faint from want of sleep. I'll tell you that later on."

They presently stepped out side by side into the dewy air, where the atmosphere was as pure and the birds' songs as joyous as though no ugly crime was hanging over the ancient sanctity of the place. The green world received them into its arms like sons, the early sunshine radiated them with morning glory, the air was sweet and clean to their mouths, as though these beauties had been created for their lustration alone. They accepted the gifts dissimilarly : Drenchard with a clown's indifference, Jermyn with a careless appreciation which pointed to no variance between the day and the deed. He whistled softly as he strode along. Drenchard moved slouchingly, his hands in his pockets, his head bent down.

In three minutes or less they had reached a spot whence they could identify the tree to which Demetrius was bound. Of his figure nothing could be seen from this point but the outstretched arms curving backward round the bole of the tree. Examining these at a distance as he came up, Jermyn saw that the hands hung flaccid and motionless. He quickened his steps and passed to the other side of the tree. Drenchard joined him.

Demetrius drooped from his bonds, with bent head and twisted shoulders. The strip of flesh visible between the bandages across eyes and mouth was as white as the patch of hair above his temple. A sleepless night, followed by a day of anxiety and service wherein he had scarcely tasted food, and then some ten hours of bitter physical pain and mental distress had resulted in a merciful oblivion to the horrors of his situation ; a condition at which Jermyn was scarcely surprised, but from which Drenchard drew back with guilty apprehension. He plucked at his companion's arm.

" Not gone off, has he ? " he whispered, as men speak in the presence of death.

" Fainted, of course ; nothing more. We'll soon fetch him round. Better loosen the cords a bit. I expect he's had enough of it."

Drenchard, paling and shrinking a little, did not move, but watched with a kind of fascination while Jermyn removed the bandages. At sight of the face beneath he wavered still more.

" I don't like the look of him, Jermyn ! I don't like the look of him at all ! I believe he's dead—I do ! "

" Dead ! What a white-livered coward you are ! I'll wager he looked a deal worse when they cut him down, and he managed to draw breath again after it."

" Well, but just feel his heart, will you ? I—I dursn't touch him."

With a look of contempt Jermyn motioned Drenchard to the task of loosening the cords, which were knotted on the farther side of the tree. But while his companion was so engaged he himself presently followed out the suggestion of ascertaining in how far the severities of the night had tried the strength of his victim. He slipped his hand inside Demetrius's breast, and in feeling for the exact spot where the beats of the heart might be registered came upon the thin cord dangling from the neck. Curiosity led him to discover the attachment. He pulled the string free and drew out the little green phial. His smothered exclamation brought Drenchard, his task half done, to his side in a moment.

" Oho, what the devil have we here ? "

Jermyn was holding the little bottle up to the sunlight when the other joined him.

" What is it ? Eh ? What are you making such a row about ? "

Jermyn did not immediately reply. The bottle was still attached to its owner, and the stopper was tied down with fine thread. This Jermyn carefully unfastened and opened the bottle. His deliberation exasperated the man at his side.

" Make haste ! What is it, eh ? "

" Patience, my Sly ! "

He sniffed at the contents, raised his eyebrows, and glanced at Demetrius's unconscious face. Finally he moistened his finger-tip with the liquid and laid it on his tongue. Then he looked at Drenchard.

" I rather fancy," he said, still keeping the phial in his hand, " that here is the solution of our difficulties, Sly."

" Speak out plainly ! " answered the fidgeting Drenchard. " You know I'm not clever at guessing, and my nerves are all on edge this morning."

" Why, so they must be, man, for you not to know a dose of poison when you see it ! The point is——"

" Poison ? Poison, my Jermy ? Here, let me look. What

the devil does the fellow mean by carrying poison round his neck, eh ? "

" Just what I was wondering, my friend. But we're wrong ; that's not the important point after all. The real point is this : how to apply it."

" Queer ; deuced queer, though," Drenchard muttered, as Jermyn fell into silence, weighing the bottle in his hand. " What a damned hypocrite ! Makes one hate the sight of his smug face—yah, you ! "

He flicked his fingers at the statuesque features so close to him, then began to pester his companion again.

Jermyn checked him sharply, and taking an empty flask from his own pocket carefully filled it with the contents of the phial. He then replaced the stopper in the bottle, fixed the thread as before, and returned the whole to its hiding-place beneath Demetrius's shirt, fastening and adjusting the clothing as before. After which he caught Drenchard's arm in his own and moved away.

" Now, what is it you're clamouring about, Sly ? " he asked with a note of good temper which had been absent from his voice hitherto, and which indicated no small satisfaction with the situation. " What poison is it ? A narcotic of some sort. A fatal poison ? Certainly, if you swallowed that dose. How do I know ? Well, I studied physic for a short time once, so you can trust me in this."

Drenchard chuckled, more with excitement than in admiration.

" What the devil haven't you been in your time ? " he cried.

" Nothing much—save what's called an honest gentleman, my Sly. Dull respectability never had the least attraction for me."

" Well, at least you're honest there ! You don't pretend to be virtuous, like your friend over yonder. To think that he really meant to poison the old man on his own account all the time ! "

Jermyn glanced at his companion with cold contempt.

" That's what you make of it, Sly ? "

" Well, what else ? Don't you ? "

" Whoever that poison was for, I hardly think it was meant for your stepfather's gullet."

" For you, then ? " suggested Drenchard staring. " But he doesn't know——"

" Not for me," Jermyn interrupted quickly.

" Who, then ? "

" For himself, most likely. And considering the life your estimable relative must have led him I only wonder that he didn't take it weeks ago. However, he didn't, and it's so much the better for us."

" Tell me what you mean, Jermy ? I'm no good at guessing this morning. Come in here where it's quiet and we can't be seen."

Jermyn complying, the two made their way to the ruined chancel, taking up such positions as enabled them to keep an eye alert for interruptions.

" Matravers has done us so great a service by keeping that poison intact," said Jermyn, " that upon my soul I'm almost sorry for him. The difficulty about the business was the inability to procure anything of this sort without being suspected afterwards. Matravers having generously provided us with the means, you can be your own executor without further help from him. When the matter comes to be inquired into, he'll have to take the consequences. He must have bought or stolen this bottle somewhere, and, as you know, such things can be traced."

" Yes, yes ; I see all that now ! " cried the other, rubbing his knees in his excitement. " Only——"

" Let me finish, Sly ! Matravers being quite safe and very comfortable where he is, there's no need to disturb him yet awhile. We won't interfere with his meditations until we're able to inform him that we've decided not to attempt to damage his moral character, after all."

" Speak more plainly, Jermyn, do. I—I can't follow you."

" In plain English, then, my good Silas, you can administer the poison to your stepfather as soon as you like. Stay a moment, though ! Better wait until we've got the coast clear. Your cousin leaves to-day, I think ? Very well ; I'll escort her to the town. That'll give you a decent time to get the business over, and when I return we'll go into the other affair together. When we've made the settlements—it's to be strict halves, mind, with all portable valuables !—we'll go down to the village and report the startling discovery that we've just made and our grave suspicions against your stepfather's servant. Somebody or other will return with us to the house, and we shall take them to Matravers, whom we overpowered in the act of escaping and were compelled to secure in the manner which they see. Of course, he's forfeited the money and the free pass that I promised him, but as I never intended him to get very far it really will be

better for him, as he won't suffer all the consequent agonies of suspense. I think that's all. Fits in very neatly, doesn't it?"

Drenchard had listened with a growing frown and many attempts to interrupt. Challenged at length, he said:

"There's one part I don't like. Why should you go off with Josian and leave me to do it alone? If anything goes wrong, you've a nice little alibi; I haven't."

Jermyn laughed as easily as if this precise point had not occurred to him ten minutes ago.

"You cautious fool! Shan't I be keeping your cousin out of the way for you?"

"I'll take the girl to Dorchester. You stay here. She's far more likely to go with me."

"Yes, and you're far more likely to blow the gaff on the whole affair! You'll be so fidgety and glum that Miss Josie will guess you've something on your mind. She's no fool, any more than I."

Grudgingly Drenchard gave in, overpowered as usual by the master will. Seeing which, Jermyn rose.

"We'd better be going in," he said, "or else your cousin will be coming to look for us. We don't want her in the grounds at all."

They returned to the house. Josian, as fresh and sweet as a rose after her healthy sleep, met them at the door. She threw up her hands as greeting.

"Why," she said, "wherever did you all get to? I've been calling all over the house for you. My uncle seems much better this morning."

"My own opinion, Miss Trehane," Jermyn answered with a graceful acknowledgment of her presence. "But all the same I'm glad to have it ratified by so excellent a nurse as you."

She took the compliment so coldly that she could hardly have been said to take it at all. She was looking towards the gatehouse.

"Where's Demetrius?" she asked.

Jermyn, who had anticipated the question, was ready for her.

"What? Has the rascal deserted his post? He was with your uncle when I left the house."

"I'll go and look for him," said she.

"Pardon me, Miss Trehane; no," said Jermyn, venturing to touch her arm to lead her back into the house—a familiarity

which the girl obviously resented—" Silas can do that. Please return to your uncle. I'll go and prepare his breakfast."

" Mr. Jermyn," Josian said hotly as Drenchard turned away, " I don't like being ordered about by you."

He looked at her sadly.

" I spoke for your own sake, Miss Trehane," he apologized with an air of deep respect. " The grass is very wet, and, forgive me, I could not help noticing that your shoes are as—as dainty as yourself. There! forgive me again "—as Josian showed that there was vitality within the slipper for all its prettiness of ribbon bow and shining buckle—" but you bewitch me into offending you. I'll put myself out of temptation by going at once to the kitchen while you return to your uncle."

She gave way before him and walked in silence to the studio. He watched her inside, then took himself off as he had promised. His chief aim at present was to prevent her from suspecting that mischief was about, and experience had taught him that the greatest wisdom in such cases was to behave as naturally as possible, even to the extent of taking the risk of a chance discovery.

But Josian was no more suspicious than most healthy minded young women of her age. She knew that her uncle had quarrelled with Drenchard and had taken a violent antipathy to Jermyn. But as he also manifested a certain amount of distaste for her own presence in the room she was inclined to attribute his change of attitude to the vagaries of a sick mind. That the old man was in any danger from either stepson or guest was a thought far from her conception.

She seated herself by the bedside, and, satisfied of the maintained improvement in Crumpler's condition, was falling into a somewhat moody fit of regret at her own necessitated departure in a few hours' time, when a sudden grip on her wrist brought her attention back to her ostensible employment. She glanced quickly at the bed. Crumpler, who had been dozing when she entered, was staring at her with wide glittering eyes. One hand was still on hers, the other was raised with outstretched finger towards the Flora bust that stood near the bed. He was muttering incoherently.

Josian leant forward and watched rather than listened. His lips formed a word which she instantly recognized.

" Demetrius! "

She thought that he was asking for his servant, and rose at

once, a reassurance on her own lips, but the sculptor's grip tightened on her wrist and he shook his head in obvious displeasure. The name was repeated still more emphatically, and the wavering hand continued to point to Flora's smiling face.

" No, no," said Josian, thinking that his wits must be wandering. " Demetrius is there." And she indicated the veiled Prometheus.

Crumpler would not have it. The matter appeared to trouble him. He whispered again. Bending very low Josian caught the words which came with difficulty.

" The Flora ! For Demetrius. Good lad. He's earned it. . . . My curse upon 'ee if you don't."

Josian leant back satisfied. The old man, who had previously promised the bust, with certain exhibitory rights, to herself, apparently now desired to give it to Demetrius instead, as a reward for his faithful service. Unless her uncle was possessed of a more romantic percipience than she had imagined and had guessed the state of his servant's heart, Josian hardly saw much purpose in the gift. But it was probable that the sculptor in his inflated self-appreciation deemed the work a sufficient recompense in itself for any number of blows and harsh words. In any case, she had no objection to relinquishing her prior claim when the gift might serve to stimulate what appeared to her the over diffidence of her silent lover.

" I understand, uncle," she said. " Demetrius shall have it, of course."

He lowered his hand with apparent satisfaction and soon fell asleep again.

Presently Drenchard slouched in. Josian threw him an inquiring look. Primed by the arch-plotter Jermyn, he gave a plausible account of Demetrius's supposititious doings and sent her into breakfast while he waited on his stepfather. As she sat at the meal, which she took alone, she heard him whispering with Jermyn in the passage.

Still Demetrius did not appear. His continued absence troubled her, but in a personal sense only. She told herself that he was keeping deliberately out of the way ; that he intended to let her go without attempting to see her again ; that she had given him the last hint in vain. The thought touched her pride. She resolved, with inward blushes, to throw her handkerchief no more to such a backward swain. Then her affections rose up, armed and impulsive. How could she tear herself away and

return to the old dreary life, and leave her secret unconfessed behind her ? What held him back from making the declaration which once, at least, had trembled on his lips ? His subordinate position ? Undeserved misfortune held no shame for her. His mental defect, or what might be such ? He was sound enough to love her, and his forgetfulness of the past mattered nothing to her love for him. His lack of worldly wealth ? Oh, out upon her if she could not take his heart for riches and his inbred courtesy for houses and lands !

So, swayed by the impulses of her temperament, she argued for an hour or more. Pride and convention went under in the first round. Her natural independence of character had strengthened by reason of her lonely life, and now, in the first problem which she had to face, the influence of the father who had neglected her with a chilly indifference had no more weight with her than that of the sick man in the studio. The matter concerned herself alone. And for herself alone would her heart give judgment.

She would not leave the house until she had seen Demetrius again.

So ran her decision ; and a malignant sprite gifted with foreknowledge would have chuckled as she made it.

She announced her change of plan to Drenchard when he presently came in, giving as a shadowy reason her uneasiness respecting her uncle. Drenchard made no attempt to argue her out of a resolve which seriously affected Jermyn's arrangements, but reported the matter in private to the prime plotter himself.

Jermyn swore, but even his ingenuity failed to turn this new development to account. To endeavour to move the girl from her purpose might arouse the suspicion which he was bent on keeping dormant. There was nothing for it but to watch events and wait for the first favourable opportunity of carrying out his plans in the girl's presence at the Tower much as he had intended to do in her absence. It was even probable, though he did not say so to Drenchard, that a little vehement love-making on his part would drive Josian from the house sooner than she now intended.

At noon the chaise which she had ordered from the village arrived. At the time Robert Crumpler had so far recovered as to render her ostensible reason for remaining so thin a one that she almost blushed as she repeated it. But Demetrius having failed still to present himself she did repeat it and even tried to

carry off what looked like an impossible situation by a compromise. She allowed most of her cases and boxes to be hoisted on to the vehicle, and sent a message to her woman that she would probably join her at the inn during the day.

Such eccentricity on the part of a strange young lady might have aroused some comment at the *Black Bear*, had not that respectable hostelry been already gossiping over the arrival of the elderly lawyer from Dorchester, who had stopped to dine on his way to the Tower. He made no secret of his place of destination, but after a brief interview with Barjona Furmedge, whom he had summoned to the inn, he set off alone on horseback to the sculptor's residence, to be joined before he reached it by the tranter himself who, obeying Crumpler's instructions, was conveying Mrs. Summerhayes to the Tower of the Winds.

XXXI

REJECTION

SOME short time after Jermyn and Drenchard had left the spot, the removal of the stifling bandages and the relaxed pressure of the cords that bound him to the tree had their effect in reviving the exhausted Demetrius. He opened his eyes to the full glare of the sunlight, and stared painfully and wonderingly around.

Ambiguity as to his situation was not possible for any length of time. The first attempt at movement brought the whole recollection sweeping down upon him in all its gloomy foreboding and distress. He strove to clear his wits, but for awhile his physical wretchedness prevented cogent thought. In spite of the warmth of the season he was chilled to the bone. Every limb was an aching misery, and his one desire was to slake a tormenting thirst.

A little breeze puffed by. He drank the coolness into his parched throat, and gathered strength thereby. Raising his head, he took as comprehensive a view of his surroundings as was possible, at the same time bringing a greater degree of intelligence to bear upon what he saw. He found that he was in the most isolated and densest part of the grounds ; that he was practically hidden from the more frequented places by the tree to which he was bound ; that not a soul was within sight. Next, remembering the circumstances in which his assailants had left him on the previous evening, it became clear to him, by reason of his unbandaged eyes and mouth, that he had been visited and abandoned again. The meaning of this was beyond his endeavour to fathom, but the discovery presently led to another of infinitely greater importance.

The thought had occurred that his recent visitor might have come in a friendly spirit—Drenchard, perhaps, less of a villain than the other, but fearfully loath to offend Jermyn ; or even his beloved Josian herself might have stolen to his side to aid him

unseen. The exquisite thought ran like a potent spirit through his enervated pulses while he put the primary notion to a practical test. A little straining at the coils of cord that were passed round his body and wrists convinced him that they had been loosened —a fact which had no part in Jermyn's plans and was due merely to the neglect caused by the excitement of discovering the poison.

But, however the circumstance had arisen and to what lover-like assumption it gave colour, it remained an unimpeachable encouragement to Demetrius in the present hour. His failing heart beat high with hope as another tentative endeavour suggested that the coils confining his right wrist were half unknotted already. His fingers were long and flexible—qualities which, with Furmedge's story ever in his mind, he had grown to loathe. Now he realized the value of the implied dexterity, and working very cautiously, lest a sudden jerk should reverse his purpose, he felt for and found the knot which chanced to be placed in the centre of the wrist below the palm.

The work was long and tedious. Many times he was forced, through the pain in his throat and the swimming in his head, to break off in the task until another frenzied spurt of energy drove him to it again. But in something under an hour the knot was untied and his hand free. With a gasp of relief he drew his arm to his side, and nearly fainted with the pain of the movement.

There were other knots, many of them, all tied with scientific precision, to be unfastened before the hardest part of his task was done. Jermyn had thoughtfully secured all the points on the farther side of the trunk, and, though the increasing slackness round his body indicated that the cord was in one length, it seemed at first to Demetrius, who had no implement in any pocket that might have aided him, that the freedom of one arm was a matter of very small importance after all.

At length the cord fell to the ground, and there remained only his coupled ankles between himself and an equivocal liberty. But by now, judging that two hours at least must have elapsed since his return to consciousness, he dared not remain longer at the spot. At any moment, for all he knew, either Jermyn or Brenchard might return, and his pains in freeing himself go for nothing.

He had fallen upon his knees in his weakness, and in that position he now crawled slowly away towards the undergrowth of brambles and bracken that, with the stems of the saplings, formed a feasible shelter for a skulking wretch to hide in at a

pinch. He twisted himself in among the leaves and trailing branches, and coming presently to a little clearing well away from the spot which he had left set his fingers to work once more. The cord round his feet being of stouter make and less ingeniously knotted by Silas Drenchard, the task of finally releasing himself did not occupy Demetrius more than a few minutes.

But he paid for his exertions immediately afterwards, and for the next half-hour lay prostrate in that tormented state when the desperate brain is at the mercy of a body too debilitated to obey its will. Realizing his immediate helplessness, he occupied the time as well as he could by deciding how to act as soon as some portion of his strength returned.

To show himself openly at the house either in his present or in his normal condition would be to sacrifice himself to no purpose. His object being to ensure the delivery of his master from the dangers which surrounded him, it seemed necessary for Demetrius to make his escape from the place while he could. He must get to the village, see Barjona, see Mrs. Summerhayes, see anyone who would listen to him and help him against the men who would murder his master.

But, failing the first named, would any of them pay attention to his wild story? Mrs. Summerhayes had already closed her doors against him. As for the others, he knew well enough that he was regarded as half mad in the village—an object of fearful interest and curiosity. What heed could he hope to receive from these? Barjona—who, by a word spoken here, a phrase dropped there, by the general consistency of his conduct, had led Demetrius's starving soul up to a living God—yes, Barjona could be relied upon. Failing him, none else. And so, failing him, where could he turn?

Inspiration came when least looked for. His mind had wandered away from the main issue to thoughts of Josian. He hated the necessity of leaving her awhile, not from any anticipated danger to her from the plotters, but from the unreasonable jealousy which every undeclared lover must feel at the thought of his beloved spending even an hour in the company of another man who openly admires her. There was even the chance that he might not see her again. She had said in his hearing that she would be leaving on this day, that her father was awaiting her at Dorchester.

Her father! The man in high position; he who held some important Government office, whom Josian herself had sug-

gested to him as a means of deliverance from the miseries of his servitude. Her father—kinsman to the man whose life was threatened—was at Dorchester !

Was there any need, Demetrius asked himself, for further thought and planning ? Was there not here a solution of all the trouble and difficulty ? If any man would listen and could help, surely that man was Josian Trehane's father.

From the moment when the conviction darted clearly and strongly into his mind, Demetrius knew that he would have to go. But, after the first shock of the inspiration had passed, he sat shuddering at the risk to himself which such an undertaking must mean. The least part of it was his open entry into the town that had purported to receive his dying breath, and where his imagination represented every second inhabitant as certain to recognize him. The greater risk, to his agitated mind, lay in the fact that he would have to present himself to a man who, as he understood from Josian, held some office connected with the criminal department of the State.

His heart began to beat wildly at the thought of that interview, of the inevitable questionings, the possible identification of himself with the Demetrius Jordan who had been hanged for murder in the earlier part of the year. The longer he allowed himself to dwell upon it, the more impossible did it seem that he could face such an inquiry without discovery, and discovery, as he read it, meant death.

He sat there crouched beneath the tall fronds of the bracken, enveloped in the cool green shadows and wrapped around with the summer silence, a prey not only to his weakened nerves but to some dread or horror that seemed no part of his natural self, and which, he dimly recognized, must be the reflex of the agony he had once passed through. His intolerable thirst and aching limbs tormented him unheeded as he faced the ordeal of a second death.

True, that death need not be such as a pitiless law would decree—so ran his disordered thoughts—his clutch upon the bottle hidden in his breast gave reality to that poor comfort ; but he still shrank from the thought of death. Life, he knew, held little for him of pleasure in the present or of hope for the future. But he was young, he was in love, and, however unreasonable the impulse, every fibre in him cried out against death in any form.

Yet, even while he so felt and suffered, he knew that he had no choice, that, be the issue what it might, he must seek this man

at Dorchester and put the responsibility of his master's life into his powerful hands. If the way was hard, he, of all men, had no right to complain. He covered his face with his hot hands and remained motionless awhile.

He had accepted the suffering, he had purposed to do the right. Why was he a coward now? Why did the joyous face of Josian Trehane press him so persistently? To love her and to lose her; that was bearable. He had never looked for other than that. To pass away from this earth and not to look upon her again: that, too, might be borne. But to die ignobly with the knowledge that she must learn of his shame, and learning, shrink with loathing from all memory of him, regarding even the recollection of his most trivial service as an insult—this was the bitter core of death, the cruel triumph of the law, the wages of sin indeed.

Yet he had purposed to do the thing that was right, and he would not draw back now.

With an effort he got on to his feet, and resolutely thrusting away his dread and fear turned his thoughts to the practical consideration of how his object might best be achieved. The grounds, in this isolated part at least, still seemed to be deserted.

He had no time to wonder why Jermyn had left him so long alone. He accepted the fact with an appreciation of its value and set his plans in order.

To attempt to leave the Abbey precincts by the ordinary exit would be to fail at the start. But there was another way, involving risk, indeed, but holding out a chance of success. In his wanderings about the grounds there was no spot that he had not visited, and his explorations had put him in possession of a few secrets.

He knew the precise place where it was possible to crawl through the lower part of the thick boundary hedge and so out into the lane below. The spot was at some little distance from his present shelter, and to reach it he must approach nearer to the house and the chances of discovery. Therefore caution must be used.

He began to move forward. All the time his nerves were on the rack lest Jermyn or his accomplice Drenchard should visit the place of his detention and discover his flight. If searched for while still in the grounds he had scarcely a hope of escape.

His advance brought him to the bank of the stream. The sight of it gave him the first sensation of physical pleasure that he had felt since his release. Bending down, he slaked his thirst in the cup of his palm, and laved face and hands freely.

While so doing, a sound, hollow and reverberating in the quiet air, sent him back to the shelter of the undergrowth with his heart in his throat.

He knew the sound ; it was one that he had heard scores of times—made by Furmedge's cart as it passed beneath the arch of the gatehouse. Craning out, he strained his eyes eagerly in that direction, and was rewarded by a sight which sent him back with only less satisfaction than would have been given by the anticipated one. He saw, not the tail-board of the tranter's cart, but the rear portion of a yellow post-chaise, loaded with the boxes which he had carried into the house for Josian Trehane as his first act of service.

She was leaving, then—so he naturally interpreted the sight —leaving the detested company of the man Jermyn and of the hardly more desirable Drenchard. He was glad of that ; glad of her freedom from the hated attentions of the one, and the boorish incivilities of the other ; glad, too, of her preceding himself upon the road. A word from her to her father might turn the balance of success or failure as far as his mission was concerned.

Presently he went on again, and after inevitable delays reached the way of escape in safety, and dropped down, a pitiable figure but so far successful, into the lane.

No one was in sight about the mill, nor, when he had crept cautiously to the point where the by-road to the Abbey branched off, did he discover anyone on the length of white road ahead of him. Yet, because the risk was one which might occur at any moment, he dared not keep to the roadway, but clambered up through the hedge on the farther side, and took to the meadows beyond.

. . . . . .

A considerable time had now elapsed since he had made the first venture, and much more, owing to his condition and the need for caution, had passed before he reached the head of the village. Once he had lain quaking beneath the bank on the inside of the hedge listening to the trampling of a horseman on the road. Barely was he on his feet again when the distinct rumbling of a cart sent him flat down again, to lie in hiding until the vehicle had gone by. And there was no subtle prescience to tell him that his friend Barjona Furmedge was passing within a few feet of where he lay.

The village being too public a place in his judgment in which to make his inquiries, he avoided it and came to a few scattered cottages on the outskirts. Here he asked whether it was known if the tranter had left home that day, and learned that he had been seen an hour or so ago harnessing his horse to the cart.

This was a set-back, but Demetrius had been prepared for it. He asked if there was any conveyance which could be lent to him for a few hours. His appearance, had he put the question to anyone of the better class, would have ensured an instant "No." But torn clothes and soiled hands weighed less against him here than they were to do later on, and as his informant was a lively middle-aged woman with a soft heart for a good-looking young fellow his request found a better reception than might have been expected. Within a quarter of an hour he was in possession of a small market-cart attached to a sturdy pony, and had set out on the second stage of his journey.

He reached the town without mishap. His fingers had handled the reins with that oft-repeated sense of familiarity that was continually throwing transient gleams upon that past darkened life of his. The greatest difficulty with which he had had to contend on the road had been his own exhaustion. At times a threatened faintness had been staved off by sheer force of will alone, while the desire, resolutely repressed, to lie down and sleep had become a positive torment.

The mellow light of afternoon was enriching the ancient buildings of the town as Demetrius Jordan drove into the lower end of the High Street, and left the pony and cart at the first inn to which he came. This was the one at the doors of which Barjona Furmedge had received his inanimate body from the prison officials some months earlier. It stood almost within the shadow of the prison, and, guessing the identity of the grim building that lowered over this part of the town, Demetrius regarded it with a shuddering curiosity.

Surely if memory could be reawakened within him it must be stirred at the sight! Deliberately he paused, gazing at the gloomy walls. But his veiled consciousness made no sign, so bending low his unshielded head he went on.

The walk up the street was an agony. He knew that he must make a conspicuous figure with his swaying gait, parti-coloured hair, and torn clothes. The day was Saturday, a market day, and the town was very full. Gigs and carts crossed each other in the long sloping roadway, pedestrians elbowed one

another on the footpaths. Here and there one or two more observant than the rest turned from the shop-windows to stare dully at the odd figure of fun toiling up the street. A few weak jokes were passed on his forlorn appearance; but, although now and then some one of the townsfolk dug an elbow into a neighbour's side and jerked a thumb after the stranger, Demetrius passed the gauntlet of possible recognition in safety, and arrived at length at the door of the principal inn.

A kind of desperate courage carried him inside, and, anticipating the order for instant departure from the first person he met, he asked at once for Mr. Trehane.

"No such gentleman stopping here!" was the sharp rejoinder.

Demetrius leaned against the wall, discomfited.

"Hasn't Miss Trehane arrived?"

"No; nor her neither."

"Are you certain that a gentleman of that name is not here?"

"I never said that, young man. There's a gentleman o' the name of Trehane stopping here——"

"Thank God!'

"But he's no plain 'Mr.' He's Sir John."

"That's the gentleman I want. Will you carry a message to him?"

"What sort o' a message?"

"I wish to see him at once."

The woman stared dubiously.

"I don't know as I can, my lad. Who are you, and where do you come from?"

"I'll tell that to Sir John himself."

"A civil tongue, please, young man! 'Twill pay best, you'll find. What name am I to take up?"

"I am not sure," said Demetrius faintly, "that he knows it."

"H'm! And your business?"

"That's for his private ear, ma'am. But I'll tell you this; 'tis on a matter of life and death."

"It always is when such mommets as you come calling on a gentleman. Well, I'll take your message, such as it be, up to his honour, for the sake of your face, my lad. But don't you go a-building on getting aught out o' he."

The woman went up the staircase, leaving Demetrius to suffer a natural suspense until her return. In a few minutes she came back, shaking her head.

"Jus' as I told you," she said. "You must send up your name."

"That won't help me, I'm afraid!"

"Not ashamed of your name, are you?"

"Why should I be?" Demetrius replied, making an effort to control the quivering muscles of his face. "Well, then, it's Jordan——"

"Ah!" The woman's curiosity had changed at once to a lively interest. "Any kin to the young man as was hanged here last 'Sizes? To be sure, you must be, or you'd never be shy o' so good a namepiece as that! Well, well, they tell me 'twas a very pretty hanging, his; but I was watching for the Prince, for, says I, one can see a dead man any day as you've a mind, but a real live prince only once in a lifetime. So I didn't see naught of it. Well?"

"Tell Sir John Trehane that I come on urgent business from a near relative of his."

The woman went back to where the Home Secretary was sitting in a comfortable bow-windowed room on the first floor.

"The young chap's name is Jordan, sir," she said in answer to his impatient, "Well?" "And he's come from a relative of your honour's."

Trehane checked an exclamation, and appeared to consider.

"What sort of a young man did you say he is?" he asked with no show of the emotion that the unlucky name had aroused.

"A very poor ragged sort of feller, sir. Looks as though he'd slept in his clothes with his head on a meal-bag."

"The kind of man to make a disturbance if he's ordered away?"

"Oh, as to that, your honour, we can have him put out soon enough, if you give the word."

"Very well. Do as you please. I can't see him."

Trehane rose as soon as he was left alone, and walked to the window, as if desirous of witnessing the ejectment of his intended visitor. But the next moment he was crossing to the door. Here he paused for a short time, nervous and irresolute, a different man from him who had a minute since calmly refused to see the stranger. Only Trehane himself knew the cost of his outward serenity.

He had taken instant alarm at the name of the young man whose dismissal he had already ordered, and he had leapt at once—as,

in truth, Demetrius had intended him to do—that he came from his brother-in-law. A dozen dangerous possibilities had flooded his mind at the connection. From these emerged the conviction that the sculptor either had betrayed the secret of the reprieve to some relative of the dead man, with the result that blackmail was intended, or that he had sent the messenger to him under an assumed name with some insolent communication.

Now another suggestion caused him to regret his attitude. The stranger might be perfectly harmless, and merely the mouthpiece of the daughter whose arrival he had been expecting for the past two hours.

He opened the door and, leaning over the balustrade, called out that he would hear what the young man had to say.

A minute later Demetrius was shown into the room.

After the first quick look at him the Home Secretary lowered his eyes, and only a slight quivering of the muscles of his mouth betrayed his agitation.

The one glance had shown him a set of features familiar with a terrible suggestiveness. If he had encountered this face in the most crowded thoroughfare of London, he would have been carried back instantly to the dread moments in Robert Crumpler's cell when he had gazed upon the livid and writhen features of one whom his carelessness had sent to meet a violent death.

Something of the horror of that time was upon him now, playing with nerves that were strung to their highest pitch by the uncertainty and personal anxiety of the preceding weeks. Because of this, he took a tone sharper and more unsympathetic with his ragged visitor than the circumstances on the outside justified.

"Well," he said abruptly, "what is it? Why do you wish to see me?"

Demetrius had paused a few steps beyond the closed door. He, too, had his agitations, his past experiences to haunt him, and these were painful in a far intenser degree than those of the wilfully callous man who sat at the table with a coldly magisterial air.

"I am deeply obliged to you for seeing me, sir," he began, "but when you have heard what I have to say you will understand that no apology is necessary."

Trehane was aware of another shock. The refined voice, the well-ordered words, were as much out of keeping with the speaker's tatterdemalion appearance as was the respectful deter-

mination that impressed without being intrusive. He looked more keenly at the figure before him.

He saw a young man of some three-and-twenty years, with a well-proportioned frame and a face that would have been strikingly attractive in its clear-cut symmetry, had it not been pallid and jaded, and worn an almost repellent expression of lurking horror in the eyes. And the details that set off this combination of the alluring and the repugnant were commonplace, even sordid, in the extreme. Torn clothing, hair disordered and grotesquely parti-coloured, a face not free from earthy stains, and hands, well formed indeed, but in the same soiled condition —all taken in conjunction in the one person, did not tend to win credit for the possessor of those unlucky attributes.

Nor was Demetrius's manner, with the nervous excitement to which his errand made him a prey breaking through the reserve and timidity naturally attendant upon the circumstances, likely to create any more favourable impression. Sir John Trehane fixed his keen eyes upon this extraordinary visitor and, finding that he did not speak though always seeming on the point of doing so, uttered a sharp, "Well?"

"I wished to see you, sir," began Demetrius, after a painful struggle with feelings aroused at sight of this man.

"So I understand. What can I do for you? Have you a message for me?"

"No, but——"

Trehane was frowning.

"Has not my daughter sent you here?"

"Your daughter, sir? I thought she was here! Has she not arrived?"

Trehane was struck unpleasantly by the look of uneasiness that his simple question had produced on the young man's face, but his own remained coldly impassive.

"What do you know of my daughter?" he asked pertinently. "Where do you come from?"

"From Mr. Crumpler's at Bindon, sir," Demetrius told him, his manner slightly steadied by the news about Josian. "And if Miss Trehane has not arrived yet, she ought to have done so, for she left the Tower some time before I did."

"No doubt she has been delayed on the road," said her father composedly. "But since that cannot be what has brought you here, please explain your errand at once."

Demetrius came forward impetuously.

" Sir," he cried, " you must come back with me immediately. There's no time to be lost ! Things may be worse than I feared ! "

The Home Secretary sat stiffly erect in his chair, and stared coldly at the intruder. He was not accustomed to being ordered about by such a tattered rascal as this.

" Please explain yourself," he said.

Demetrius's nerves, unable to bear this last strain of anxiety about Josian, broke from his control. He leaned across the table, forgetful of his own danger, too much in earnest to be diplomatic or careful of his speech.

" I mean this," he cried, " that unless something is done, God alone knows what will happen ! There is a plot to murder my master—Mr. Crumpler of the Tower—your brother-in-law, sir ! I have been asked to do the deed, and, though I have refused, God knows how long they will wait for my hand to do the work. He is an old man, sir, old and not to be trusted to take care of himself. These villains are set upon his death—and he is sick and feeble. He has ordered them from the house, but they refused to go. I have no power to make them do so : I am only Mr. Crumpler's servant. But he trusts me, sir, and so I have come to you. Oh, for the love of Heaven, lose no time ! I shall never cease to reproach myself if any harm happens to him or to Miss Trehane in my absence ! "

The elder man seemed coldly amused.

" In your absence ! " he repeated. " But you have just disclaimed any power to mend matters while you were on the spot."

" That's true enough, sir. Yet I have a body and a life, and I would risk both to prevent murder being done."

" At the same time, it appears, young man, that you have run away from the danger."

The words were not a taunt, but were intended to point out an inconsistency in a very incoherent tale. Demetrius frowned under a natural misapprehension.

" I left because it seemed the best thing to do," he explained. " Mr. Crumpler was in no immediate danger. The men who wanted to make me their tool still expected to force my consent. They would not be likely to take any risk themselves except as a last resource—one is a coward, the other too cautious and clever to run the extreme hazard himself if he can help it."

" Who are these men ? "

" Mr. Crumpler's stepson, Drenchard by name." The Home Secretary made no sign. " And a friend of his, who calls

himself Jermyn. It is this man who has approached me concerning the crime."

"Do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing, sir, beyond what I tell you."

"Then, presumably, he knows nothing of you?"

For the first time Demetrius dropped his eyes. He made no reply. Trehane went on in his unimpassioned voice:

"Yet you would have me believe that a man, an utter stranger to you, comes to you with the startling proposal that you shall take the life of your master."

"Sir," said Demetrius, suddenly foreseeing a possibility which, in his own absolute integrity, had not previously occurred to him, "do you not believe me?"

"Pray keep cool. I have not said that. I am merely questioning you. It would appear that this man Jermyn must entertain a high opinion of your discretion. It is not a subject that many men would care to discuss with even a servant, unless perfectly sure of the ground."

"Mr. Jermyn had threats and bribes," Demetrius answered with an uneasiness that did not escape the other.

"Oh, he had threats and bribes, had he? What threats and what bribes?"

"Sir," cried the tormented Demetrius, "is it really necessary to go into that? Think what you like! Think that this man holds me in his power—that he knows some secret of my past—only, for God's sake, believe that I am in the most deadly earnest in all that I say!"

"That I do not for one moment doubt."

"Then——"

Trehane held up a hand.

"Your story, however, lacks the stamp of actuality. I do not say that you are lying intentionally; I should be sorry to say that——"

"Good God!" cried Demetrius, and a sudden faintness sent him swaying against the table. Had he suffered all these things only to be told that he was a self-deluded liar?

Trehane regarded him more attentively. His sudden spasm of mental pain had rendered him horribly like the dead man in Crumpler's cell. So much so that had the Home Secretary followed his impulse he would have rid himself instantly of the suggestive presence. But with admirable self-composure he waved his hand towards a chair.

" You may sit down," he said. " You seem tired—or ill."

Demetrius stretched out his hand to grasp the chair. In doing so his sleeve shot up and bared his lacerated wrist. Trehane's eyes became momentarily fixed on the raw flesh.

" You have had an accident ? " he asked.

" No. But last night they tied me to a tree."

Trehane's eyebrows went up.

" I regret that so much violence was used," he said then. " But no doubt your friends judged it necessary to place you under restraint for awhile."

" My friends ? My enemies, rather ! " Then Demetrius's startled eyes stared wildly at his companion. " My God, do you think I am mad ? " he cried.

The Home Secretary's hand slid gently down to a drawer on a level with his elbow. He opened it before replying. Inside lay a loaded pistol.

" I should not like to go as far as to call you—mad," he said quietly. " But your story is hardly one that a sane person would believe in. If you will try to exercise your—reason, you will see for yourself several glaring discrepancies. I have already pointed out one : the disagreement between your action in coming to me and your alleged devotion to your master. I will merely indicate another. You have tacitly disclaimed any previous connection between yourself and the man whom you accuse of a very serious felony, yet you ask me to believe that such a one would place himself so far in your power as to broach the subject of a concerted crime. Surely I cannot be blamed if my own reason stumbles at the monstrous assumption."

" But, sir, hear me, I implore you ! I have admitted that the man has a certain power over me ! Will you force me to tell you what that is ? "

" Keep calm ! You will not impress my credulity any more by violence of speech or action, rather the other way about. Listen to me. In no case should I wish to hear anything of which it may give you either pain or shame to speak. But I must point out that such a suggestion has its own corollary."

" And what is that ? " asked Demetrius passionately, for he had no place in his agitation for his companion's forensic and cold-blooded reasoning.

" That you are endeavouring, in colloquial language, to get your blow in first. Indeed, I should be inclined to accuse you of this if I had not already formed my opinion of your unhappy case."

Demetrius's head sank. He dropped his face into his hands, and sat so while all hope of help from this man slowly died. Sir John Trehane, with the vision of the sculptor uncovering the awful face by the light of the candle ever at the back of his mind, regarded him a little less severely. Nor could he himself be wholly blamed for the view which he had adopted with perfect sincerity. Prejudiced as he undoubtedly was by his visitor's startling resemblance to the one who was connected with the fatal error of his life, he had, to support his misconception of Demetrius's condition of mind, Josian's dimly remembered reference to the young man. What the precise phrasing of her letter had been had slipped from her father's memory, but he recalled enough to know that it pointed to some mental deficiency.

"You still refuse to believe in me?" Demetrius asked presently, raising his listless head. "You still believe that I am mad? The people in the village say so, I know. But I didn't think that you, sir, would share their ignorance."

It was an unfortunate reference. It set the Home Secretary's brows twitching again.

"I think," he answered not unkindly, "that long brooding over some event in the past—some unhappy family episode, perhaps, has affected you in a very distressing manner. The cure, I hope, lies in your own hands. A little resolution, a little summoning of the will power, may, I trust, enable you to throw off this strange delusion. It would be well, if possible, for you to leave scenes that have any—painful associations for you. Try to dismiss the whole affair—whatever it may be!—from your mind. You are very young; I pray God there is every chance of your recovery. And, above all, for your sake I hope there will be no repetition of the distressing incident of last night."

Demetrius was not attending to the carefully chosen words. He had risen and was moving towards the door. Too much time had been lost already.

"Have you anything more to say?" he asked listlessly, half-way across the room.

"One thing, yes. A piece of sound advice. You probably hardly realize the extent of what you have done. But you have made a very serious allegation against another man—a gentleman, apparently—without, on your own showing, a tittle of evidence to put forward. If you continue to do this kind of thing, you will get yourself into serious trouble. I should be sorry to hear that any harm had happened to you."

" If you will ask Miss Trehane's opinion of Mr. Jermyn——" began Demetrius.

But the other interrupted him with the dry reminder that his daughter was not at hand.

" God grant you see her soon ! " said the lover to the father, for at the back of his mind was an uneasiness, which reason would scarcely justify, lest Jermyn had intercepted Josian on the road.

He had reached the door and had opened it when Trehane spoke again. It had occurred to him that even a crazy lad might be sick and hungry.

" Stay a moment ! " he called. " I will order you a meal before you leave."

But Demetrius, who had accepted with gratitude a crust of bread from the woman at the cottage, declined the richer hospitality, and passed on his way downstairs.

XXXII

FROM THE SKY PARLOUR

AT the first, Mrs. Summerhayes had refused to go to the Tower at Robert Crumpler's request. With some perception of her reason the tranter had informed her that she would run no risk of meeting strangers at the place, since, by the time that the lawyer arrived, all the guests would have left the house. Upon which, after a little quiet pondering, the lady agreed to accompany Furmedge as desired.

On their arrival at the Abbey gates there was no sign to suggest any interference with the owner's plans. True, the gate was unlocked, in itself an unusual circumstance, but one which had no special significance for Mrs. Summerhayes, while Furmedge himself took it to mean that Demetrius was in attendance on his master. The true explanation was that it now being the duty of no one in particular to see to the locking of the gate, it had been left unfastened after the departure of the chaise with Josian's baggage a short time earlier.

Leaving the cart in the roadway and the lawyer's horse hitched to a staple, the party of three made its way up to the house without encountering any of the residents. Furmedge's thunderous knock on the half-opened door brought Josian out of the studio. She regarded the new-comers with amazement.

" 'Tes arl right, missy," Furmedge assured her. " The meäster be expecten we."

And in confirmation of the statement Crumpler's voice cut into the momentary silence.

" Let 'em in, hussy, let 'em in, you fool ! Come along in, 'Jona—I'm ready for 'ee."

Josian stood back, greatly wondering. The tranter's presence was natural enough, but her keen eyes had already detected Mrs. Summerhayes beneath the veiled bonnet and enveloping shawl, and she guessed that her visit had no precedent. More-

over, the elderly gentleman who moved with a certain air of authority—who was he ?

But wonder was not to be allayed nor curiosity gratified, for on the arrival of the four in the sick-room Crumpler immediately ordered his niece to withdraw, and she had no time for more than a hurried inquiry of the tranter respecting Demetrius. As Furmedge had no news to give, and as the girl knew that the veiled eyes of Mrs. Summerhayes were fixed upon her, she was not sorry to have a reason for quitting the room.

Crumpler had justified Jermyn's frequent assertion that his ultimate recovery was an assured thing, by having already regained much of his usual vigour and bodily ease. He was still in bed, but was able to sit up without discomfort, and presented the appearance of a man suffering from no more than an ordinary indisposition, and well advanced towards convalescence.

The business which had brought the four together was soon concluded. The old man's purpose had not changed. Apart from the choicest of his sculptures and carvings, which were left to the Nation, the whole of his possessions, including the freehold house and land, was to go to his servant Demetrius.

" Demetrius what ? " demanded the lawyer at this point.

" Nothing—he han't got any other name that I know of," Crumpler replied. " 'Tis a poor wastrel of a loon that I took in when starving, but he's been a good lad and shan't lack a reward. There, get it down, man, and give it to me to sign. I'm getting tired again."

" But this is irregular," the lawyer protested. " Doesn't the man know his own name ? "

Crumpler chuckled.

" To tell the truth, he don't. He's lost his memory. Ask Barjona there if 'tisn't so."

The tranter solemnly nodded.

" I see," said the man of business. " And this is the name you've given him ? The name he's generally known by ? "

" 'Tis so," Crumpler said. " I heard the name somewhere, and it seemed so good as another."

" I see," said the other again, and wetted his pen anew. " Well, well, as we can't do any better, no doubt it will stand."

He finished his part, and presented the document to the testator for his signature. The others duly attested. Thereupon the business was concluded, and the party rose to go.

The lawyer opened the door for the lady, but on the threshold she hesitated and hung back. Then she spoke to Furmedge as he stood behind her.

" I wish to say a few words to Miss Trehane," she told him. " Can you find her and send her to me ? I will wait here. You need not stay for me. I shall walk home."

The tranter went away on his errand, and the lawyer, pleading his long return journey, took his leave of her a moment later. She remained waiting just within the studio door.

The sound of a step on the uncarpeted stairs drew her eyes upwards. The footfall was not heavy enough for the tranter's rustic tread, nor had it the delicate elasticity that characterized the somewhat rapid gait of Josian Trehane. Curiosity, fast deepening into alarm, drove the listening woman backwards. But the next moment she was peering out cautiously again.

A man's feet came into view. She darted back and concealed herself behind the half-shut door, and threw a nervous glance into the room beyond her. Robert Crumpler, exhausted by the exertion of will-making, lay among his pillows with closed eyes, apparently unaware of her continued presence in the studio. The footsteps had ceased. Mrs. Summerhayes ventured to look out again.

As she did so, a voice struck into the pause. The man on the stairs was addressing an unseen companion.

" ——more fool you ! " she heard him say, before she noiselessly pushed the door close and tiptoed into the centre of the room.

Escape from the new-comer being of more importance to her than her intended speech with Josian, it remained now for her to consider the best means of flight. This was a matter that presented some difficulty. Her retreat by way of the front door was obviously cut off. She was entirely unacquainted with the plan of the house, so that, although she observed another door lower down in the same wall as the one by which she had entered, she was ignorant of its outlet and dared not venture through.

While she stood considering her position the footsteps again became audible, and a moment's listening gave her the unwelcome assurance that they were heading in her direction. At any instant, she knew, the tranter or Josian might appear in the passage, when explanations, she imagined, were sure to follow,

and her presence be revealed to the man whom she was trying to avoid.

Still she stood irresolute, at one moment tossing back her long black veil the better to survey her surroundings, the next, pulling it closely over her face lest the door should open and her features be revealed without disguise. And the footsteps came on.

She caught sight of a curtain hanging at a little distance from her. She tore it aside, and her heart leapt as she found another door. She clutched the handle feverishly. It turned in her grasp, but the door remained firm. She realized that it was locked, and cursed her luck, for this would have meant egress into the open air. She dared not remain where she was, for the curtain, in its natural position, hung against the wall, and even her slight figure would have betrayed her presence. She shook herself free of the folds and slid back among the various paraphernalia of the studio to the point farthest from the passage door, seeking cover as eagerly as a hunted hare. She moved with circumspection, for although she was sufficiently alarmed she had not lost her head. Fear was, in truth, a subservient emotion ; her primary one, which made essentially for caution, was the desire for revenge.

Once more the steps had paused, halting this time immediately outside the door, which had already begun to move under an incoming pressure. Now the keen ears of the woman could detect another set of footfalls, heavier and more deliberate than the first, approaching from a distant part of the house. Furmedge was coming back.

With the coolness of desperation she faced about, and once more ran her searching eyes along the crowded room. An easel supporting a drawing-board of some size covered with half-finished designs for a frieze attracted her attention. She ran round it and immediately discovered in its rear another door which had hitherto been concealed from her eyes by the lumber of the studio. Tearing this open, she disclosed the ladder which gave access to the Sky Parlour above. She darted into the recess, and was no sooner hidden in the darkness than the other door was thrown open, and Jermyn glanced in.

At the same moment Tranter Furmedge arrived on his heels, and not seeing the lady whom he had left there naturally concluded that one of two things had happened. Either Miss Trehane, whom he had failed to find, had chanced to pass by in his absence or Mrs. Summerhayes had discovered her without

his aid. In either case, his business was ended, and as the elder woman had desired him not to wait for her, and the owner of the house had particularly requested that the visit of the lawyer should be kept secret from his guests, Furmedge had no reason for making inquiries of the man whom he himself was mildly surprised to find still an inmate of the Tower.

He therefore merely knuckled his forehead to the strange gentleman, and in answer to a sharp demand as to his business replied that he'd a-bin up to see Meäster Crumpler.

" How the devil did you get in ? " Jermyn asked then.

" The geäte wa'n't fastened, your honour."

" I'll soon remedy that, my man. Mr. Crumpler doesn't want you prowling about at all hours like this. Hi, you Sly ! Show this fellow off the premises, and be careful to lock the gate after him. Why the devil didn't you see to it before ? "

Drenchard, who had followed him downstairs, sulkily explained that he had left the duty to his questioner, and departed with Furmedge, Jermyn cursing the pair of them with his usual facility. When they were out of earshot he turned and, entering the studio, made his way to the bedside.

Through the partially opened skylight that formed the central portion of the floor of the chamber above, Mrs. Summerhayes watched him furtively. Her temporary need for alarm being over, her face held now but the one expression—hatred of the man whom she saw in a foreshortened perspective moving about below her.

Jermyn stood for some minutes at the side of Robert Crumpler. The old man had fallen into a sleep which the presence of the other failed to disturb. There was silence in the large glass vaulted studio, and for the time Jermyn showed no more of animation than did the figures of stone and marble and clay which crowded round him on their pedestals and armatures. Cold immobile faces, with unseeing eyes, white limbs set as though in death, chill antiquity and modern renaissance, all pressed in upon the slumbering man and his watcher—an apposite crew of careless witnesses. Had Lawrence Jermyn desired a dramatic setting for his crime he could scarcely have found a more fitting one.

But no such thought was in his head. He was cool, calculating, clever as ever. His temper was ruffled, but only slightly. Josian had just informed him from behind her closed door that she did not intend to leave the house before the next day. As he

had been prepared for such wilful inadaptability on her part he was not now disturbed to any great extent. His annoyance and discomfiture had arisen when she had first intimated delaying her departure, and he had since modified his plans to meet the emergency.

Having satisfied himself that the slumbers of the old man were genuine, Jermyn walked away to a table from which the various impedimenta of modelling tools, chisels, mallets and lumps of dry clay had been removed to make room for a tray of physic bottles, plates and glasses. Here he paused for a long time, touching first one article, then another, with his head all the while slanted slightly in the act of listening. Presently he raised his hand to a pocket of his inner coat and drew out the spirit flask. Still listening intently, yet with a hand steady enough for his purpose, he removed the cork from a half-empty bottle on the table and poured the contents of the flask into it. He then replaced the bottle on the tray, and after rinsing the flask out with clear water slipped it back into his pocket. He had just done so when the door opened and Drenchard came in. Jermyn raised a finger and beckoned him across the room. He spoke in a whisper.

" Got rid of the lout ? "

" Yes, he's gone."

" Locked the gate after him, I hope ? "

Drenchard nodded. His small eyes were furtively watching Jermyn's hands. These rested lightly on the edge of the table.

" What was the fellow doing here ? "

" I'm sure I don't know."

" You didn't let him into the house ? "

" No."

" Then it must have been your cousin."

" You'd better ask her."

" I think I will."

As he gave the answer, Jermyn raised his hand and it began to hover in an abstracted way over the contents of the little table. Drenchard's narrow eyes never left it.

" You'd better take a turn now," remarked Jermyn casually, letting his fingers fall as if in perfect heedlessness upon the bottle with which he had tampered, and slightly shifting it in a purposeless way. " The old man's asleep at present, but I shouldn't wonder if he woke up soon."

Drenchard glanced at him uneasily.

" Where are you off to ? " he questioned.

" I ? Oh, I'm going for a short stroll in the grounds to stretch my legs. I may pay a visit to our dear Demetrius to see how he's getting on."

He walked towards the door.

" Here, stay a moment ! " cried the other hastily.

" Or I may have a little talk with the charming Josie. She's been cold of late, and my heart is oppressed. If you need me, Sly, I shan't be far off."

" But, I say——"

" Sorry, my friend. Duty and beauty alike summon me. I must attend."

He marched coolly out and slammed the studio door in Drenchard's face. The noise awoke the sick man. Jermyn, as he walked away, heard him railing at his stepson.

He had no need to wonder about Josian's whereabouts. He had slipped the bolt of her room during his conversation with her some short time previously ; so that there was nothing to prevent him from going openly and at leisure towards the place where they had left Demetrius in the early hours of the morning.

His suspicion that anything had gone wrong with his plans was not awakened until he was close on the spot, and failed to observe the outstretched arms of his captive curving round the tree. He muttered an oath and broke into a run.

But no amount of searching among the undergrowth that surrounded the tree could transmute a few yards of stout cord and a couple of crumpled handkerchiefs into the drooping figure which he had bound to the trunk on the previous evening. The unpleasant and disconcerting fact stared at him from the emptiness and had to be admitted. Demetrius had escaped.

Jermyn's career would have ended in ignominious failure years ago had he been one to accept disaster without immediately looking round for a remedy. It was, as in the present case, not always possible to find one immediately, but the act was more to the purpose than either useless regrets or the endeavour to determine the cause of the calamity.

Demetrius had escaped. How, was not at present of much moment ; when, was of infinitely more consequence ; where, of the greatest importance of all.

He picked up the cord. When he had handled it earlier in the day it had left, as he now remembered, a slight dampness on his fingers. Now it was perfectly dry. From its position it had not

been touched by the sun. The warm air alone had dried it. Had it recently been bound around the body of Demetrius, the ends at least, dropping down into the cool damp growth of rank herbage, would have retained the moisture for a considerable length of time. Arguing thus, Jermyn gathered that his escaped prisoner had been gone for many hours. Where he had fled it was impossible to say. If he had sought any friends or acquaintances in the village it was hopeless to count on his adaptability as a pawn in the game. For Jermyn's story to have the necessary verisimilitude, it was essential that Demetrius should not be able to prove an alibi.

There still remained a chance that Drenchard had not yet administered the fatal dose. In which case the deed must be postponed until Demetrius had been tracked down and either forced or induced, by reason of his love for Josian, to return.

Jermyn raced back to the house, and burst into the studio.

Drenchard was not there. Robert Crumpler lay fast asleep. And on the table the bottle which Jermyn had touched before going out stood empty to the last drop of mingled physic and poison.

XXXIII

THE WAY TO WIN HER

HIS first impulse was to curse Drenchard for a precipitate fool. His next, to find him and tell him so. But Jermyn seldom acted upon impulse, and having vented his anger on the air he approached the doomed man with the purpose of ascertaining whether the mischief was irrevocable.

Robert Crumpler was in a deep sleep, but there was an ominous change from the comparatively easy slumbers that had held him for the greater part of the day. His breathing was heavy and laboured, his face paler than when Jermyn had seen it last, and exuding a cold sweat. If there had been any doubt as to whether the poison had been actually administered, there was none now. Jermyn had none ; but as a last determinative he raised one of the eyelids with his finger and thumb, and found that the pupil had contracted to a mere pin-point. He stood back, thinking.

He had spoken that truth when he had told Drenchard that he had once studied physic. He had not gone very deeply into the science, but he had learned enough to know that in the early stages of a case of poisoning some remedy might reasonably be sought. It was, therefore, for him to decide whether it was desirable to adopt such a course in the present instance. A great deal depended upon how much Crumpler might remember or guess at upon his possible recovery. Enough, in all likelihood, to throw suspicion upon Drenchard, at least. Drenchard, accused of attempted murder, or even examined on the point, meant, as Jermyn was sardonically aware, the betrayal of himself. Then there was Demetrius with his evidence to be reckoned with. By himself, he might represent no great danger ; taken in conjunction with Crumpler's story his word would gain credence, while Jermyn, himself by that time an accused man, would have lost the power of recrimination.

On the whole, therefore, it seemed the wisest policy to let Robert Crumpler die.

That point being settled—and Jermyn, who brought all his wits to the making of a decision, rarely went back upon it—there remained the question of the future.

The old man was as good as dead. It might be possible, in this God-forsaken hole, to pass off his demise as due to natural causes. But a not unlikely pertinacity on the part of some local Jack in office must be taken into consideration. The intended scapegoat having vanished, who remained to fulfil that useful position? Drenchard, obviously. But Jermyn waived his claim for a moment. The tranter Furmedge had visited the house at the right time, but would such a fabricated accusation bear the light of day? There was always the shadow of the defaulting Demetrius in the background of Jermyn's thoughts, to threaten complications.

The heavy breathing of the man in the bed, though, in truth, it was growing more feeble, interfered with the clarity of Jermyn's thoughts. He walked out into the passage. As he did so, two sounds broke out simultaneously—the stealthy opening of the living-room door and a violent clattering overhead.

Drenchard's face, white and evil-looking, peered round the corner of the door. Jermyn, conscious of a sudden disgust of this half-hearted co-criminal, beckoned him out. The noise overhead increased in volume.

"It's—it's the girl," muttered the younger man with shaking lips.

"I know," Jermyn answered easily. "Better go and stop her, or she'll wake up your stepfather."

A dull red flush suffused Drenchard's damp cheek as he turned quickly away.

"Am I to let her out?" he asked, his foot on the stair.

"Certainly. Stay a moment, though. I'll go up."

He pushed the other aside and was half-way up the flight before Drenchard spoke again.

"Where am—what am I to do?" he quavered like a timid child.

"You? Go in there, of course." And Jermyn indicated the studio. "If there's any change, let me know at once. Don't come, but close the door. I shall wait for that signal."

"Jermy, one moment!" Drenchard was following him. "I—I don't like this! I—I'm afraid,"

"Of him?" The other looked his contempt. "What a lean sinner you are, Sly! Afraid of—him?"

"I—suppose so."

But in his dull way Drenchard was aware that he was afraid of something infinitely greater and more terrifying than a weak old man gasping out his last breath—something vague, dark, unseen, that lurked round corners and in shadows, ready to grip him by the throat and to scream out to the world what he had done.

Something of which his companion understood. But with characteristic callousness he drove the shivering Drenchard back into the studio.

"You'll ruin both of us if you go on like this!" he observed, leaning down the stairway and speaking under cover of Josian's blows on the door. "You'd better go back and learn to get used to it. Go back, I say!"

And he waited on the stairs while the other slunk off as he was bidden, half angry, half cowed.

Jermyn dismissed the episode with a contemptuous shrug and went on to the door of Josian's room. He withdrew the bolt and in a momentary silence tapped gently on the panels. Instantly the handle turned and the door flew open.

In the aperture appeared Josian, looking very beautiful in the heat of her wrath and indignation. In a direct line with her figure was a window through which the afternoon sunshine was streaming into the room. The walls were covered with some yellow pigment, and the bare boards had assumed much of the same tint, so that the girl stood there surrounded by a gilded glory that struck points of radiant light from the outline of her form, and turned the rim of her piled-up masses of hair to burnished gold. Jermyn's passion half intoxicated his cool brain as he looked. She was alluring, magical, infinitely to be desired. She must be won.

She was the first to speak, breaking out at once into a valley of indignant protest:

"Mr. Jermyn, what is the meaning of this? Why am I kept a prisoner in my uncle's house? Who dared to bolt my door?"

"Not I, Miss Trehane, you may be very certain. Pray accept my apologies for an outrage which I did not commit."

"Not you?" Josian regarded him sceptically. "Then it must have been that hateful Silas! What does he mean by such a liberty?"

" Don't ask me, Miss Trehane. I have only this minute learnt of his unwarrantable impudence."

Josian came on to the landing and shut the door sharply behind her.

" I shall complain to my uncle," she said. " 'Tis infamous indeed ! "

Jermyn made no reply. Josian looked indignantly at the unobtrusive bolt that had been affixed to the bottom of the door.

" That wasn't here yesterday," she declared, out in her reckoning by a few hours.

" I know nothing of it," said Jermyn.

With the closing of the door the ethereal radiance had been taken from the girl, and she became once more a beautiful creature of the everyday world, yet retained enough of the elusive quality to hold the man to his desire.

" I mean to know more of it ! " said she.

" Miss Trehane ! "

He put out his hand entreatingly. She looked at it with a kind of disapproving curiosity, and began to move away.

" I am going to my uncle," she said.

Jermyn slipped in front and intercepted her.

" Mr. Jermyn ! Sir ! "

" You wish to go to your uncle ? " he asked, giving way step by step, but still keeping in front of her. So they descended the stairs.

" I do."

" I don't wish to prevent you. But first there is one question I wish to ask."

" Well ? "

" How did the tranter Furmedge get into the house ? "

" I let him in."

" Oh, you did. May I ask where you were ? "

" In the studio, of course."

" Did the man see you there ? "

" When I returned there, he did."

Josian gave her answers tartly. Jermyn had grown thoughtful in the extreme. He said nothing more until they had reached the passage below. Then he indicated the living-room by a gesture.

" Will you come in here for a few minutes ? " he said. " I have something to tell you that will interest you, I think."

" Has Barjona gone ? "

" Some time ago."

Josian glanced towards the studio. She forbore to question Jermyn about the others, for the tranter had contrived to advise her of her uncle's desire for secrecy.

" Who is in there now ? "

" Your cousin, I fancy."

" Not Demetrius ? "

" I don't know where he is."

" How is my uncle ? "

" That is what I want to tell you about."

Josian looked at him with wide eyes.

" He is worse ! " she cried, and made to run toward the studio.

Jermyn held her back.

" In any case, you can do no good," he told her. " Come in here."

Wondering, and with her heart beating a little more quickly than usual, she allowed him to lead her into the room. At the same instant the studio door banged to.

A little flush came into Jermyn's face, and some nervous tension was relaxed. He had never shown to better advantage as he handed the girl to a chair. Even Josian, with her heart swelling against him, admitted inwardly that he was handsome enough in his assured and airy way.

He took up a position near the entrance and remained standing.

" Well ? " said the girl a little anxiously. " Please make haste. What is it ? "

" I must begin," said Jermyn, " with what has been trembling on my tongue ever since you heard it last."

Josian sprang up, her eyes aglow.

" Is this a time to tell me things I hate to listen to ? Do you call yourself a gentleman, an honourable man——"

" No ; I call myself neither. For your sake, perhaps I am neither. I am nothing but your lover, Josian ! "

" I will not listen ! I have told you already that I could never care for any man like you. Why do you pester me at such a time ? Open that door ! How dare you take advantage of me in this way ? I will go to my uncle ! "

Jermyn stepped back before her, but only that he might lean against the door and prevent her exit. Point by point he answered her.

" You will not go to your uncle yet. You will have to listen to

me. I shall not undo the door until you have promised to become my wife. I choose this time for renewing my proposals because it is the most favourable time for me. And I am ready to take every possible advantage to obtain my end. Now, you dear charmer, you know the kind of man with whom you have to deal."

"I've always known you for a dishonest and unscrupulous rogue!" she retorted with hot eyes and lips that tempted him in their red disdain. "What meanness are you going to stoop to now?"

"The meanness of marrying you in spite of your refusals," he told her, and laughed a little.

She echoed his laugh, even more derisively.

"Do you fancy you will ever force me to marry you against my will?"

"I fancy that I may."

"You are very bold, or very foolish, Mr. Jermyn. I shall leave the house at once."

"It would have been better, from your point of view, if you had done that earlier. Going away now can hardly save you."

Josian, for the first time, was conscious of slight alarm. The man's cool manner, oddly at variance with his ardent gaze—and he had never removed his eyes from her face—was not without its effect in her peculiar situation. But self-reliance was her habit, and courage the framework beneath it. She merely told him to explain himself.

"To begin with," he said, "your uncle is dead."

"Dead!"

Josian clasped her hands in surprise. But was it the truth, or was the man lying? He read the doubt in her clear eyes, and answered it.

"It is perfectly true. You shall judge for yourself when I please. I should be a fool indeed—and though I love you to the injury of my heart and soul my brain is still clear enough to win you—if I were to build my case upon an easily proved lie."

Josian turned away from him and gazed through the window into the vivid green distance. Into the silence came the cawing of a few rooks. Much the same thought was in her mind as had held it when, staring in the same way out into Poole High Street, she had first heard of Demetrius Jordan. Dead! Why should men ever die? Her blood ran sweetly in her veins: her young

life was at one with the sunshine, the noisy rooks, the swaying trees, the bees, the flowers. Why need men ever die ?

Jermyn stood watching her. With each variation of mood he told himself that she was yet more charming. He did so now ; and at the time he was planning the blackest villainy against her peace of mind and happiness.

At length she looked at him again. Her hands were clasped lightly at her bosom, her face was somewhat agitated.

" I cannot understand this," she said. " My uncle seemed so much better."

Jermyn moved a step nearer.

" You do not doubt my word," he said.

" No, for, as you say, I can easily satisfy myself. Though, for that matter, what object could you have in lying to me ? " If the man wished to drive her from the house, she had already declared not only her readiness, but her determination to leave immediately. " I cannot understand it ; that is all."

" You are quite right in saying that your uncle was making a good recovery from his attack," Jermyn went on. " He was recovering fast. But—something happened."

Josian grew a little alarmed.

" Pray speak out ! What do you mean ? "

" I am sorry to have to tell you, Miss Trehane, that Mr. Crumpler died by violence."

Josian was not the girl to scream even under a great shock. But she changed colour and opened startled eyes upon her companion.

" By violence ! " she repeated in a lower voice. " Do you mean that he has been murdered ? "

" Murder is a very ugly word, Miss Trehane."

" No uglier than the deed ! "

" And we will not name it yet awhile."

" Speak for yourself, Mr. Jermyn ! I prefer to call things by their true names ! "

" Please be calm. Sit down, I entreat you."

" Be calm ? Do you expect me to be calm and sit down with my hands in my lap when you have just told me that some wicked person has killed my poor uncle ? "

" Come, come, 'tis very pretty to see your emotion, my dear love," said Jermyn with an insolent familiarity that brought the blood rushing to her cheek. " Very pretty indeed. But I'm

bound to admire your artifice more than your sincerity. To be plain, such dainty affectation doesn't go down with me."

"How dare you?" panted the girl. "You insult me at every turn! Is it because I have just lost my natural protector that you dare such insolence, or has the thin coating of your good breeding worn off?"

"I love to hear you rail, my sweet Josie," said Jermyn, his eyes drinking in her stormy beauty. "Especially now that I have you in my power."

"In your power? Because you have been rude enough to station yourself between me and the door? You must think me very easily frightened, sir!"

"Oh, no, I think only what is fair and admirable of you. Will you listen to what I have to say?"

Josian bit her lip. As yet she had no desire to make an undignified scramble for either door or window. She regarded him with cold contempt, and sat down without speaking. Jermyn remained guarding the main way of escape.

"I have told you that your uncle is dead, and you grow indignant because your tears of sorrow fail to move my sympathy."

"You're lying," Josian struck in. "I did not pretend to cry. I was not fond of my uncle, and he did not like me."

Jermyn struck his hands lightly together.

"That's an admission, Miss Trehane. I will, by your leave, remember it."

"As you please. 'Tis nothing to me either way."

"That you shall decide presently."

"Please have done with these trivialities!" Josian cried with a show of impatience. "Surely there are things of far more importance in this awful affair! Because I never professed to love my uncle I am not hard-hearted enough to be indifferent to his death, especially," she added with a little shiver, "such a death as you have hinted at! If my poor relative has been murdered, and you are persuaded of the fact, why are you wasting time with me instead of taking steps to ensure the punishment of the wicked villain who has killed him?"

"Because," Jermyn answered slowly, "there is a point in connection with the subject that I wish to discuss with you."

"There can be nothing to discuss. If you have any suspicion as to the doer of this wicked deed, your duty is clear—unless—unless——"

" Unless ? " queried the man with a smile.

Josian had leapt up with a cry. She was regarding him with horror and aversion.

" Let me go ! " she cried suddenly. " Oh, this is horrible ! —Let me go at once ! "

He threw out his arm. She could not reach the door without personal contact with him, and with her present thought hot upon her she would not have allowed a thread of her garments to touch his own with her consent. She withdrew to the wall and stood there, a growing abhorrence in her eyes. Jermyn laughed a little, but made no attempt to follow her.

" You ask me why I don't do something," he said. " At present, I am at a loss to know whom to accuse."

That there was something behind the coolly uttered words was evident, and Josian stood silent, waiting to learn what his purpose might be.

" It would be inexpressibly painful to me if I had to accuse —you."

" Me ? "

She caught her breath with wild horror, understanding in that moment all the hateful meaning of this interview, all the baseness of his scheming, all the terribleness of her own position. Understanding this last with an infinitely deeper sense of her helplessness than did the plotter before her, since there were things between herself and her uncle of which this man could know nothing. Then her spirit flared up, and springing suddenly forward she struck him on the mouth.

" You vile liar ! " she cried. " Let me go ! "

He flung his arm across the door, laughed at her rage, and bade her listen to him.

" Would it sound so very impossible," he gibed. " What love was lost between you ? You made an incriminating statement to me a moment ago. Is it not a fact that your father and this old man were at enmity for years ? Had you not purposed leaving the house at noon to-day, and did you not unaccountably delay your departure ? There are witnesses to testify to that. Were you not seen in attendance at the bedside within an hour or so of the death ? There is Tranter Furmedge—you have admitted as much to me—to testify to that. As to a motive, if an inherited antipathy is not strong enough, shall we say that there is upon the premises a handsome young man, employed by your morose relation in the capacity of servant, and, as such,

grossly ill-treated by him—I myself will bear witness to that !—he being powerless, for some reason which would soon appear, and, appearing, prove his ruin, to release himself from that service—in whom you were far more deeply interested than was consistent with your assumed positions of mistress and man ? I ask you, if all this came to light, would my story seem so very improbable, my sweet Josian ? "

For answer she looked at him with clear courage in her eyes.

" Don't come nearer ! Don't touch me ! " she said. " You are viler than I thought ! "

" If I loved you less, you would have no need of your dainty abuse," he said, his manner changing in a way that was hateful to her. " Josian, am I to be blamed if you force me to woo you in such a rough way ? "

" Love ! " she cried, and shut out the sight of him with her hands.

Impervious as he was to most things, the gesture stung him.

" You madden me with your charms," he said, " yet you deny me a civil word or a kind glance. I wooed you in more regular fashion the other day, and yet I fared no better. What man whose love was worth the name would not make use of whatever means came to his hand to break your sweet proud spirit and to bring your lips to his ? "

Josian dropped her arms to her sides. She had reviewed the position in those few moments, and found it bad enough to flick her mood into defiance.

" Am I to understand," she asked, " that this is supposed to be another declaration of your love for me ? "

" It is more than that. It is the end of my courtship of you. After all that you have compelled me to explain to you, I think that you will hardly refuse for the second time to be my wife."

" Your wife ! Heaven help me indeed, if it has come to that ! "

" It has come to that," he said with an easy confidence that set her shuddering. " Your refusal means all that I have insinuated, for, I warn you, no woman yet has played with me and gone unscathed. If I can love, I can hate almost as well."

Josian forced a smile.

" I rate your hate higher than your love," she said. " That at least I can despise—the other burns me with shame ! The thought of it almost makes me hate myself ! That you—Oh,

God, that you !—should dare to come to me with my uncle's blood upon your hands——"

"Stop!" cried Jermyn with an ugly look. "That's a dangerous word for even you to say to me."

"I do say it!" Josian retorted, riding high upon the full tide of her courage. "I do say it, and I say this as well—I'd count it lesser shame to meet the fate you seem to have planned for me than to call myself your wife. There's my answer, Mr. Jermyn, and though you asked to the end of time I could have no other for such a man as you! Please let me pass!"

"One moment! You appear to have forgotten a point in my argument. I told you that it is in my power to ruin Demetrius Jordan. Have you considered that?"

Josian had, but, having regard to the unscrupulous character of the man who had made the statement, she had placed no credence in the assertion. She was not greatly disturbed to hear Jermyn revert to it now.

"Prove it," she said with something of her father's manner.

A diabolical notion entered her tormentor's head.

"I will not do so now," he said. "The young man shall prove it himself in your presence, as soon as he returns."

Josian's courage suddenly fell. Demetrius was not there, then. She was alone in the house with this murderous ruffian and her cousin Silas, who was nothing, or worse than nothing in this affair. Josian had already formed a fairly accurate notion of his complicity. The thought of Demetrius's absence was more to the girl at that moment than what she still regarded as Jermyn's last insincere attempt to weaken her resolve. In her ignorance of the facts of Demetrius's history, she had never imagined that the hidden past held anything discreditable to him.

With him absent and her uncle dead, her mind turned naturally to the father whom she had not yet learned to regard as a help in time of trouble. Now she leaned mentally towards him, desiring his support and counsel, his protection and assistance both for herself and for Demetrius. If she could only get to him!—get away from this house of blood and threats and cruelty—find her silent lover, and seek her father at his side.

With the desire came the resolve, and the spirit of this untried girl rose to the occasion. She met Jermyn's triumphing look with defiance.

"You can't keep me here against my will," she said. "I am going to leave at once."

" I fear that I cannot permit it," he replied in his usual smooth tones. " Just consider, my sweet one ! You have made a very dangerous accusation against me. Until we have arranged things on a more satisfactory basis, I really cannot allow you to be at large."

Josian choked back her indignation, and schooled herself to inquire how he proposed to prevent her departure.

" I will escort you to your room, and give you until to-morrow morning to decide upon your final answer. I am afraid I cannot put off the public announcement of your uncle's death beyond that time."

Her eyes flashed fire upon him, but again she controlled herself.

" You mean that you will bolt me in—make me your prisoner?"

Jermyn bowed with a regretful air.

" Open the door ! I will go."

Had he tamed her ? Was this the preliminary sign of her ultimate yielding ? He was not sure. But since he had won his point so far he forbore to press her any further at the moment. He opened the door of the room and was insolent enough to offer her his arm. She shot ahead of him, shuddering. But at least she made no attempt to run to the outer door. At the foot of the stairs she paused. The man was so palpably base that she had come back to her first doubt of him.

" I must see my uncle," she said.

Jermyn made no objection, and followed her to the studio door in silence. At first Josian thought that the room was empty, but a slight movement among the half-draped figures and easels made her aware that Drenchard was cowering in a far corner. Only the sanctity of a death-chamber viewed for the first time kept vehement words from bubbling out of her mouth.

She had never held Robert Crumpler in any sort of esteem ; her girlish intolerance had made no allowance for him. His overweening self-appreciation was to her mere vanity ; his failings too obvious for palliation by any degree of genius ; his indifference to others token of an innate selfishness. But she had never looked on death before ; and this man had died by violence. Her heart swelled within her, and she left the room with wet eyes.

To Jermyn's demand as to whether she was now satisfied she vouchsafed no reply. She heard him follow her up the stairs,

and when she had entered her room she caught the sound of the bolt being shot on the other side of the door. She, for her part, turned the key the next instant.

Then, with throbbing pulses and a fluttering heart, she sat down to think.

XXXIV

IN THE SKY PARLOUR

JERMYN immediately returned to the studio, and haled Drenchard out of his corner.

"Stop your snivelling!" he ordered roughly. "'Tis enough to make the old man rise up again with astonishment."

"That's just it," whined the other in a feeble voice. "I keep thinking he's going to!"

"You ought to be kicked for a white livered fool! A child of six would show more sense! Listen to me! I want you to go to the village."

"What for?"

"That damned Demetrius has bolted—your fault, of course. You couldn't have tied him up tight enough. Never mind that now! He must be found and brought back at once."

"What can I do?"

"Make inquiries. The tranter may have seen him. If you find him, tell him in confidence that Miss Trehane is in trouble and wants him here. Pretend you've broken with me; d'ye understand?"

"Yes. But will he come?"

"Considering that the safety of your neck depends very largely upon it, 'tis to your interest to make him. Now be off with you! And for God's sake try to look something like a man and less like a burst bladder!"

"I'm glad enough to get away from this, God knows!" muttered Drenchard as with a last fascinated look at the figure on the bed he slunk away.

Jermyn, of tougher fibre and, despite his superior mental capacity, possessed of less of the degraded form of imagination that was already tormenting his fellow in crime, suffered neither in nerve nor in conscience from the proximity of the evidence of

that crime. He sauntered across to the sitter's throne, installed himself as comfortably as possible, and, like Josian on the upper floor, began to review his position.

With regard to his own amenability in the affair he had no tremors. Apart from what seemed a natural gift for slipping out of tight places and leaving them for other people to fill, he had, in this instance, more than one likely proxy to hand. Once Josian had been bullied and terrified into marriage with him, he would have tied her tongue to a great extent against any accusation or revelation on her part, since she could hardly speak without incurring suspicion herself—so, at least, he would be careful to point out to her. For an easy scapegoat, either Demetrius or Drenchard would serve, as events should best direct. Demetrius for choice. There were several scores against him, and he could be conveniently accused at once, whereas, without Drenchard to provide a *prima facie* reason for his continuance at the Tower, his footing there would be of an equivocal kind. And the hidden wealth still remained to be found.

This point in his argument sent his reflections in another direction. He realized a hitherto unappreciated opportunity. To all intents and purposes, he was alone in the house. What if he could find for himself the treasure of which the old man had boasted? The thing that was worth the price of a man's life!

The price of a man's life! The description stirred the cynical humour that was in him. He even glanced at the distant bed with its silent occupant. A man's life? One man had paid the price already—he who had originated the phrase. And without doubt another would follow. Drenchard or Demetrius. What did it matter, so long as it was not Lawrence Jermyn?

But this was no time for airy speculation. If the thing was to be done, the search to be made in the other man's absence, there was scarcely a moment too much. He got to his feet and took a calculating survey of his immediate surroundings. The studio itself seemed the happiest hunting ground, since, of all rooms in the house, it was the one most closely associated with the dead man. Therefore, in the most callous and matter-of-fact way, Jermyn began his search. No salesman taking an inventory could have brought more level-headed and business-like qualities to the work.

The task presented difficulties inseparable from the conditions. Order and method were things unknown in the chaotic lumber

of the sculptor's workshop. There was much to allure, much to disappoint, and before half an hour had passed Jermyn had decided to add another commercial asset, that of system, to his mode of procedure. He would work along each of the four walls in turn, in an ever narrowing round, carefully examining any case, box, cupboard or other likely repository that he approached. The focus of his field of investigation was the bust of Flora. He kissed his hand to it, taking the coincidence for a propitious augury.

An overcast sky had brought the evening on before its time. While the upper part of the studio, lit by the glass, was still full of a wan grey light, down here among the cumbrous easels and blocks of unwrought marble it was already dusk. Hangings and screens had been arranged before many of the windows in the sculptor's disposition of the light. The farthest corners were black with heavy shadows, and had Jermyn brought imagination to his nefarious task his blood would have run cold more than once.

He worked thoroughly, yet with caution. It was necessary to avoid any obvious disturbance, lest Drenchard should guess how he had employed himself in his solitude. And all the time he kept his ears on the strain for the other's return.

It was this excessive wariness that presently apprised him of a sound, exceedingly faint in itself, coming from some point above his head. His hands remained suspended in their action and his eyes quickly sought the crystal roof above. One of the lights was still open, and, rapid as his movement had been, an instant longer had altered much of his history. He was in time—no more—to see a woman's face being withdrawn from the opening.

Then what a non-existent imagination had failed to do, this sober fact accomplished. His hand fell shaking to his side, and a little moisture broke out upon his forehead. The woman was not Josian Trehane. So much his instantaneous glimpse of the dark rayed figure told him. The face had been seen but vaguely, but the impression of dark hair and floating black draperies was as vivid as the sight had been brief. Not Josian Trehane. And yet by rights there should be no other woman in the house.

When he had recovered from the shock which this apparition of flesh and blood had given him, he made his way towards the lower end of the room and laid his hand upon the door that led to the chamber above. It opened under his touch, revealing a

narrow aperture wherein was set an ordinary workman's ladder. There was a glimmer of light at the top.

Jermyn sprang into the cool dry darkness, moving with caution in spite of his haste. His well-shod feet made little sound upon the wooden rungs, his hands outstretched on either side ensured an easy and unbroken passage. He reached the top, breathing somewhat quickly but with his wits and nerves in good order.

The change from the dusk of the room below to the comparatively lucid atmosphere of the Sky Parlour required a moment's pause before he was able to throw a penetrating glance along the circumference of the gallery. He found it to be much broader than he had supposed, and littered with the refuse lumber of the studio itself. Broken statues, detached limbs of stone and clay, heaps of rubble, vases, disused implements, all hindered his first searching glance. But as far as he could see it had no outlet. This gave him a measure of confidence. He advanced, neither hurrying nor lingering, neither making undue noise nor taking precaution to soften his footsteps. He did not call aloud. But near the open light he paused to glance into the room below. From this point it was just possible to see the table where the medicines were placed.

And then, for all his vigilance, he came upon her suddenly, and meeting her face to face, in the last light of the dying day, stepped back with a fierce oath, knowing her for the woman whom he had wooed and wed and wronged five years ago.

He knew her, though her beauty, always of the dark, quick-fading kind, had gone so utterly that it might never have been. But if her sufferings had struck something from the face which he remembered they had given it much more. Self-willed she had always been; now she was strong. Her petulance had become bitterness; her obstinacy, resolution. Then, a woman to be trifled with, crushed, and flung aside, she was now a woman to be reckoned with, and beholding her in this sinister hour he saw already his plans tottering and his forecasts in jeopardy. For here was a woman who could wait and bide her time, and strike at last.

She met his infuriated gaze with a calmness which showed the lack of any surprise on her part. She even smiled coldly at his dismay, and uttered the name by which she had known him, with a little pointed contempt.

"Eustace!" she called, and he noticed that her former cooing tones had grown slightly dissonant and satirical. "Upon my

honour, when I fled from your house with your bruises thick upon my arm I never intended that we should meet again ! "

He found his voice and swore at her.

" Damn you ! what are you doing here ? "

" I live in the village, Eustace. I came back to my old home. Is there much to wonder at in that ? The home from which you lured me with your fascinations and your lies."

" Lies ? " He had recovered his balance by now, and echoed her word with a short laugh. " That comes well from you, Annabella ! Your own lies were greater than any I ever told to you."

She bowed her head with a quaint dignity that sent the blood surging through him anew.

" I admit all that," she said. " I did lie to you—oh, about many things ! My age, for one. Did you ever guess that I was three years older than you ? And about my father's wealth, and my own prospects ? Oh, yes ; they were all lies. But then, without them you would never have married me. And I didn't want to be your mistress for a season. I wanted to be your wife for always. You told me you were the son of a baronet. You called yourself by a fine name—I wonder if you remember it ? And when you suggested the runaway wedding, it suited me with my reservations as well as it suited you with yours. Oh, yes ; I think we were well matched in deception in those days when you used to ride over from Squire Matravers's place to woo me by the Long Meadow Gate. Very well matched. But I was the more innocent. I lied for pure love ; you, for gain."

" D'ye think I want to hear all those old stories ? " cried Jermyn impatiently. " D'ye think they didn't turn stale in my mouth long ago ? What pleasure or profit did I ever get from you, you hag, that I should care to remember now ? "

Mrs. Summerhayes did not immediately reply. She was leaning against the balustrade that divided the floor of the gallery from the skylight—leaning in a listless attitude that concealed a genuine purpose. She was aware of the danger of her position—alone in the house with a desperate man. Her only chance of escape was the poor one of gaining unhindered the door which led to the ladder, and which Jermyn had forgotten to close. Therefore she hugged the gallery rail imperceptibly, sliding her body an inch a minute nearer to the open space which gave her a hope of freedom. If it came at the last to a

rush for the doorway her present position gave her the advantage, for here by the rails the space was fairly clear, whereas the floor where Jermyn stood, some couple of yards nearer the wall was cumbered with objects not easily avoided by hurrying feet. She continued to talk in the same half-indifferent, half-bantering strain, watching her opportunity for action, and hiding her fear with a courage which a better woman might not have known.

"Shall I speak, then, of more recent things?" she asked. "Though, I'm afraid, I shall always come back to my insane love for you!"

Jermyn said nothing. He, too, was afraid. All his ease and lightness had dropped from him. He was uneasy, and for once had lost the art of concealing the fact. How much had she seen? How much did she know? this woman who stood there gibing at him with a caustic tongue, and with the bitterness of hatred in her eyes. He knew the cause of that hatred. He had sinned against her in many ways, had made her pay a hundredfold the price of her amorous deception—pay both in body and in mind, in blood and in tears, until she had fled from his house bearing their baby girl in her bruised arms. All this she might have forgotten, once free from the torment of his presence, but he had, from sheer lust of brutality, pushed her too far. He had made the mistake of following her, claiming the child while repudiating the mother. The tender atom of babyhood had not survived beyond a month, and the desperate woman had laid its death at the father's door. She had endeavoured to air her wrongs to the world, and he, fearing that the scandal might injure a rising popularity, had attempted to bring her once more under his personal control—a project which she ultimately defeated by her secret return to her old home.

All this Jermyn now knew. But what he was not aware of was the fact that during the second time that she was eluding him she had carried a phial of poison about with her against the day when she might be miserable enough to fall once more into his hands.

Memory was busy with her now, lending a sinister light to those more recent events on which, in her last speech, she had threatened to dwell. Seeing him silent before her, her courage rose still higher. She looked him fairly in the face, gibing more openly at him.

"How does your latest wooing speed?" she asked; and,

noticing his perceptible start, she drove her point home with emphasis. "Your wooing of Miss Trehane?" she added, watching him.

"Damn you, leave her alone, will you?" he cried with sudden hostility.

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed.

"Oh, I have stung you, have I, old lover of mine? Listen to me. I did my best for you."

"Your worst, you mean, you she-devil!"

"No, my best. I have seen the girl——"

"You dared that?"

"I did; for your sake. You were together when I first saw you. It was not hard to read what was in your mind. Young, and well-connected, and wealthy of course; yes, and pretty too. Almost a beauty. I had her into my house, and urged your suit with all my powers. But Miss has a mind of her own. Oh, yes; very nearly a beauty—more than I ever was. Poor me! And —yes, I'll confess it, Eustace—I almost hated her! Do you know why?"

"Because of her good looks, no doubt. God! what hell-cats you women are!"

"You're wrong. I hated her because—O God, indeed! Can anyone understand a woman save her Maker? I hated Miss Trehane for the sake of my own dead love; because she had won that poor worthless treasure which had once been mine—that wretched, wretched sin-stained heart of yours! There! Strike me for my folly, but so it was! I don't expect you to understand, I don't understand it myself."

"Let's have an end of these cheerful reminiscences!" broke in Jermyn savagely. "What was your little game?"

"To help yours!"

"D'you expect me to believe that?"

"There's proof, if it were worth pursuing. You had a letter, warning you of a crushable and yet a dangerous rival. I sent that letter."

He glared at her. His lips were parted slightly, and the gleam of the teeth was dangerous by suggestion. For the moment the question, "What has she seen?" which was surging incessantly through his heated brain, became clouded over by this new amazement.

"What? You hated the girl so much that you'd have flung her into my arms because your own disordered mind could

conceive no worse fate for her? Flattering, upon my soul! But let me tell you this, madam—Josian Trehane is to me what you never were! You never stirred one drop of my blood. She sets my whole body on fire! You had no power to hold me a moment after I had learned the hollowness of your pretended wealth. I'd marry her, by God, if she hadn't a penny in the world and only her shift to stand upright in! Let your pride eat that, and choke itself with the bitterness! Her little finger's more to me——"

"Stop, you fool, oh, you poor fool! You're wrong again! I may have hated her for the inexplicable reason I have told you of. But, as God shall judge me, I'd have spared her, had there been any other way! No. It was you I wanted to punish—you I wanted to make suffer. The law had spared you hitherto—your brutalities, the death of the child—the law would not touch you for these. But marry a second woman with the first alive, and you would be in the grip of the law at once. That much I knew; that was what I was waiting for! Now do you begin to understand a little of the feeling which I have for you? I say, do you understand it now?"

Jermyn did understand, and he knew that, supposing her to have seen and to have interpreted aright the sinister incidents of the room below, he might count his life already a forfeit thing. Unless. . . .

He stood back against the wall. In this, the greatest crisis which he had yet experienced, his brain grew singularly cool and clear. He made his calculations with care, measured the distance between them, her physical disadvantage, his own position. Both were silent. Into that deadly pause Jermyn crowded many questions.

Did she stand before him as a failure? Had his discovery of her presence robbed her of her desired revenge, even as it had snatched from him all hope of his new love? Had she no weapon left? Was it that fact which so raised her ignoble passion that it almost touched magnificence in its palpable overmastering of her fear? Or was she concealing her power and playing, with a masculine scope and courage, for a higher stake still—his life or hers? God, how he hated her! An encumbrance, a millstone, a danger not to be risked—that was how he regarded her in the savageness of his rage and dread and disappointment.

The interview had nearly reached its culmination. In no case

could it have gone on much longer. The woman precipitated matters a little by a laugh. It was low and mocking; the same laugh that had once shocked the tranter when he had called Demetrius Jordan a sinner. And it was of the young man that she spoke now.

"When I heard," she began, "that a friend of yours, Demetrius Jordan, had murdered——"

The ghastly word was the last that she uttered. It formed a fitting cue for the desperate man to whom she spoke. He might have been waiting for it so promptly did his action—and up to this moment he had been remarkably still—follow upon her utterence. The word froze on her lips as he threw himself upon her, his hands at her throat, forcing her to her knees.

She struggled against him with an energy which was half fear and half courage, but was no part of her natural strength. And fighting silently, with his hot face and murderous eyes within a few inches of her own, she contrived at length to throw him off, and thus succeeded in gaining the top of the ladder. But before she had stumbled down a dozen steps he was upon her, and there, in the vault-like gloom they strove afresh, now slipping down a rung, now scrambling up, with hands clutching at the rough walls or gripping the sides of the ladder—two desperate beings, each with a life at stake, she endeavouring to gain the open door below, he seeking to render her purpose of no account.

The struggle had lasted for two agonizing minutes when into the heavy death-charged silence of the place there came the sound of a closing door. The woman gasped and hope betrayed her. For an instant the new development caused her to relax her energies, a circumstance of which Jermyn was quick to avail himself. To him the interruption threatened ruin, utter and complete. There was no time to weigh the pros and cons of the danger. This writhing, struggling woman must be silenced quickly.

He gathered up his strength for the final attack. He felt her grow limp beneath his grip . . . he flung her from him and heard her body strike the floor below. Peering down, he could see her lying huddled shapelessly in the dim light that crept through the half-opened door from the studio. He ran down, leapt over the prostrate form, and thrusting it back emerged into the room below. He had barely locked the door behind him and concealed the key when he heard Drenchard's voice crying

fretfully for him in the passage. He stepped across the room and met the younger man on the threshold.

" You're back, then ? Well ? "

" There's some talk about a woman who's disappeared ; but no news of your Demetrius."

XXXV

FLIGHT

BY ten o'clock at night the clouds which had gathered at sunset had spread over the whole sky and a light rain was falling. At such times the Tower of the Winds took on, even in the lesser gloom of a summer night, an added isolation. The trees enveloping it appeared to draw together and to spread their rustling branches more closely over it, while the soft hiss of the rain made an additional sibilant note in the murmurous noises which ever surrounded it.

It was at this hour and under these conditions that Demetrius entered the grounds in the same way that he had left them earlier in the day. Weary and jaded, sick both in body and in mind, only the fire of anxiety burning hotly within him had enabled him to make his way back without hesitation or delay of his own choosing. The return journey had been performed by a tired horse and partly in the dark, with a driver who could scarcely hold the reins for fatigue and who, dozing incontinently at times, would start into consciousness to find the animal at a standstill, cropping the hedgerows. Once the way was missed altogether. And in spite of the reasons for haste Demetrius's progress had been slow. And now that he had reached his master's house at last he had no very clear idea of what he ought to do next.

Thought seemed clogged, his brain moving as heavily as did his feet among the rank grasses and brambles of the place. At one moment he regretted that he had not followed the impulse of half an hour ago and sought out Barjona Furmedge. He half turned back. Then the old anxiety, forbidding the loss of a single instant, confirmed the former resolution to push on alone and he struggled forward again.

Once, near to the house, which as far as he could see was in utter darkness, his strength failed him. Happening to run into a tree, the impact shook him to such an extent that he remained leaning there awhile, scarcely conscious of his surround-

ings yet aware of purpose with all the ghastly persistence of a nightmare. The worst features of this phase passed, and he was beginning to recover and to pull himself together when a low sound, infinitely dreary and distressful, struck on his ear. He left the tree, advanced a few paces, and listened again. He heard it once more, a kind of soft sobbing gasp, coming from no great distance ahead. He took his bearings as well as he could, and steered himself by the sound, which continued to emerge out of the night's silence from time to time. At length it sounded so close to him that he ventured to speak. His voice was harsh and unnatural as he called out to know if anyone was there.

Instantly the tremulous note of distress became changed into a little cry. And it was then that he knew who had flung out the appeal for help that had drawn him to her side.

He went forward quickly.

" Miss Trehane ! Don't be afraid ! I am here ! It's Demetrius ! "

" Oh, oh ! " He heard her running through the lush grass towards him. " Where are you ? Oh, thank God ! Demetrius, is it really you ? "

The next moment her hand had brushed his arm, and was clasping it round. She still sobbed at intervals, but now little hysterical bursts of laughter lightened her distress and showed her to be greatly moved.

" Miss Trehane, what is it ? For God's sake tell me what has happened ! " he cried.

" Not here ! Not now ! Help me to get away ! I must get away at once ! "

" You shall," said Demetrius, and as her dear weight leant against his swaying form it turned his weakness to strength, his doubt to resolution. To feel her clinging to him, to hear her appealing for his help, to know that he alone could aid her in her need, all this touched his manhood into that protective sense which is its highest attribute. It was such a moment as he, poor outcast of humanity as he was, could scarcely have hoped to welcome into his experience. " You shall," he said again.

For a moment he heard her struggling with her sobs in the darkness. Then, " Oh, Demetrius, you Trusty Servant ! " she breathed, and he almost thought that she laughed.

But, in any case, she was serious enough the instant afterwards, answering spontaneously the question which was trembling on his lips.

"My poor uncle! Oh, Demetrius, they have murdered him!"

He started, and her hand fell from his arm.

"Good God!" he cried. Then, "God help me, I am too late!"

"Too late to save him; yes. Did you guess? Did you know?" Her fingers were clutching him again; he could feel her breath on his throat and cheek. He answered unsteadily, for, although the news was not unexpected, it had shaken him.

"I knew they wanted his death. But I scarcely thought that they would have dared it so soon! I did my best to save him—before God I swear it, Miss Trehane!"

"You needn't tell me that," said Josian gently. "But this isn't all. It was Mr. Jermyn, and—and—oh, can't we get away?"

"We will go at once," said Demetrius, crushing back his own miserable sense of failure because of her infinite distress. "There is no doubt about this—this awful thing, I suppose?"

"None. I saw him lying dead. Quite peaceful; but dead. I am quite sure of that."

Demetrius drew her on a few yards in silence. He was wondering how the deed had been done. There was, in truth, much that he desired to learn, but this was not a fitting time to question the agitated girl by his side. Once assured that his master was beyond his reach and aid, he turned quite naturally to this dear new service which summoned him from the fact of her distress and helplessness. He did not even invite an open expression of her trust in him. He did not trouble to ask himself how this new and tragical development would affect his own position. All that could be settled later. For the present it was enough to know that Josian needed him.

"Can you find the way?" she whispered as his steady arm stayed her stumbling feet.

"Yes; I know the place very thoroughly."

"Will you be able to find the key? What shall we do if they are at the gatehouse?"

"I am not taking you to the gatehouse, Miss Trehane. I know another way."

"Thank Heaven!" she breathed.

They went on in silence, broken only by his deep breathing and the swish of her skirts against the undergrowth. To her, it was wonderful how clearly he steered her round fallen stones and the rotting trunks of trees; and it was a fact that he was

making far easier progress and at a better pace, too, now that he had the added responsibility of her presence. His own footsteps fell more steadily, and there was no more precipitating of himself against trees or half-fallen masonry. At length he paused, and disengaged his arm from her hand.

"Are we there?" she asked.

"I think so. We should be. My God, what a terrible affair this is! When I think of my poor master——! Yes; here is the place."

"He spoke very well of you, Demetrius, the last that I heard."

"Did he? I am glad to know it. I tried to serve him as a servant should. To think that he should come to such a terrible end!"

"'Tis appalling indeed! Murder——" he seemed to feel her shudder, though she was a yard or so away—"is such an awful thing!"

"Truly an awful thing!" he agreed in a suddenly lifeless tone. It seemed to him that those few words of hers had gashed his heart and that it was bleeding inwardly. He busied himself with stooping down and forcing aside the brambles and trails which had sprung back across the opening in the hedge after his own recent passage. When he spoke again it was in a voice from which all but the prosaic quality necessary to the occasion had been expunged.

"If you will bend low and keep your feet clear of the bracken, Miss Trehane," he said, "I don't think you'll find it difficult to lower yourself into the road. I'll hold the branches back until you are through."

She obeyed him and negotiated the opening easily. He heard her feet strike lightly upon the roadway, and a moment later dropped down by her side. Josian drew a deep breath.

"Thank the Powers!" she cried in a low voice. "How I hate and loathe the place! What we have both suffered there! I hope and pray I may never see it again!"

Demetrius still sought refuge from his own emotions in the purely matter of fact.

"We had better not waste time," he urged. "They will follow you, I suppose?"

"In the morning, when they find that I have gone, no doubt. But I think we shall have a few hours' start of them."

"How did you get away?" he asked as they set off together along the road.

"Through the window!" she said, and laughed. Since leaving the grounds her spirits had risen somewhat, but they were still beyond her control, so that her mood passed irregularly from an unnatural gaiety to an abnormal seriousness.

"Through the window, Miss Trehane?"

"Of my room. Mr. Jermyn bolted me in."

"He dared do that?"

Josian flamed in the darkness.

"He's a devil!" she said, and stamped the dusty road.

"But the window is twenty feet or more from the ground!"

"Yes; but the ivy grows to within three. I clambered down somehow. I lost a shoe and tore my gown and scratched my poor hands woefully. Oh, Demetrius, I'm a terrible sight if you could only see me."

"This is worse than I supposed! You have lost a shoe, you say?"

"Yes. I kept hitting my foot against the stones and pricking it with the brambles. That's why I was crying to myself when you found me."

Demetrius had stopped. They had left the shelter of the overhanging trees that lined the lane while it ran outside the Abbey grounds, and were now come into the open road. The driving rain, though of no great volume, sprayed into their faces. Another thought struck Josian's guide.

"Have you no cloak, Miss Trehane?"

"No. I was afraid it might catch in the ivy."

"Well, you can't go on like this. You must be quite wet."

"I'm rather damp, certainly."

"I'm going to ask you to take my coat and my shoe. That'll be a poor fit, I'm afraid, but better than nothing."

"Oh, Demetrius!" she gasped in a kind of subdued rapture.

"It's a good mile to the village," he said stolidly.

"But what will you do?"

"My stockings are very thick."

"I won't take the coat," said Josian with a pretty air of determination.

"You must, please," said he with an even stronger show of resolve.

She gave in for the sheer joy of obeying him. She loved this new masterful spirit which had peeped out once or twice from

beneath his livery this night. Demetrius held the coat while she slipped her arms into it. It was warm from his body, and the intimate note brought the blood to her cheek. He wrapped it round her with care, afterwards replacing the missing shoe with one from his own foot. The adjustment was better than might have been expected, since the shoe was Demetrius's own property, well-made and fitting his slender foot like a glove.

"Will it answer?" he demanded anxiously as the girl made the trial of a few steps.

"Very well, indeed," she assured him. Then, with a winning note of gratitude, "Oh, Demetrius, why are you so good to me?"

He might have told her then, here in the silence of the night, with the soft rain wrapping them round, and the tall dark hedges shutting them in—told her the pitiful story of his love, that passionate secret as he fondly imagined it to be, and telling it, would have done so hopelessly, not asking for her love in return, but merely for the joy of serving her. The impulse rushed upon him, but his innate sense of delicacy drove it back, and the next moment he was filled once more with the damning conviction of his own unworthiness. He steeled his throbbing heart, and answered her coldly; it was enough that she was wearing his shoe.

"It is my duty to do what I can for you, Miss Trehane."

The formal words, the stiff manner, chilled the girl at his side. She could not altogether understand. Surely he might have answered her a little more warmly than that! For five minutes afterwards they went forward in silence.

"Where are we going?" asked Josian at last.

"I will take you to Mrs. Summerhayes's."

"Oh, no! Not there! Anywhere but there!"

Demetrius was surprised at her vehemence.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because she hates me. I don't know why; but I saw it in her eyes. Besides, she wants me to marry Mr. Jermyn. Don't ask me why! 'Tis a puzzle to me. But I'd sooner sit in the road all night than go there."

"I want, if possible," said Demetrius slowly, "to avoid the inn. It's the first place Mr. Jermyn will come to when he finds you gone."

"I wish we could go straight on to Dorchester," sighed Josian. "My father is there."

" I know. I have just come from him."

The girl stared at the tall column which, moving steadily at her side, represented Demetrius in the darkness.

" So that is where you were ! You have been to my father ? " she cried.

" Yes."

" Will you tell me why ? "

" I wanted his help and protection for Mr. Crumpler. You see, Mr. Jermyn had let me know what was in his mind. He wanted my co-operation, in fact."

" Oh ! The evil beast ! And you told my father about it ? What did he say ? "

" He would not believe my story. He drove me away as a madman."

The bitter words were checked by a soft palm pressed on his bosom.

" Oh, Demetrius—you ? How cruel, how unjust ! What did you do then ? "

" I came back. But I missed my way on the road, and found, as you told me, that I was too late."

" It is all very dreadful," said Josian, after a pause. " I must get to my father as soon as possible. I suppose he will believe me, though my story will sound even more impossible than yours. Couldn't we get a carriage at the inn and go straight on ? "

Demetrius, impressed by her evident earnestness, agreed, although he thought it very probable that the word had been passed round and that he was likely to be detained by Jermyn's orders.

" Yes, no doubt we could do that," he said with forced alacrity. " And I suppose, we ought to give information as to what has happened."

" Oh, no, no ! " cried Josian, distress panting in every word. " That will never do. Not until I have seen my father. He is very cold and stern, but he is very wise, and he will tell me what I ought to do."

" But, Miss Trehane, a murder has been committed, and we know who has done it. Ought we to remain silent, even for an hour ? "

Josian again laid her hand on his breast.

" Demetrius, we suspect, and in our hearts we know ! But what can we prove ? You say that my father would not listen to you."

" That is true, but——"

" Please be guided by me ! You don't know all that has happened, and how miserable and frightened I am ! If I do anything to arouse Mr. Jermyn's rage, he will fire his shot at once, and oh, he will be very vindictive. Besides, he would be bound to defend himself in the only possible way. And if he did, why, to tell you the truth, his position is a good deal stronger than even he knows it to be. No : I daren't do anything until I have talked to my father, and even then I have no great hope of any good coming out of this terrible business."

Demetrius went on thoughtfully. Presently he spoke again with a certain diffidence, for the girl had thrust no particular confidence upon him :

" Miss Trehane, I know that the question must seem sheer impudence from one in my position, but could you not tell me a little more of what has happened ? I think that it might help me in making my plans for to-night ; and it is very important that I should do the right thing."

Josian hesitated. The whole affair was so hateful to her that she shrank from speaking of it even to a man who would understand. But at length, lest her reticence should look like a want of trust, she brought herself to tell him the main facts of the position as it affected herself and Jermyn.

Demetrius listened in silence. When she had finished, his indignation and horror had grown to such a height that he hardly dared trust himself to speak. While the words were stumbling at his lips Josian, now fairly embarked upon a tide of confidence, ran on into further explanations.

" The worst of the matter is," she said, " that there is a great deal that might lend colour to the horrible accusations—things which I am very much afraid my cousin Silas knows. You see, there was a reason for my going to the Tower. I went, by my father's instructions, to recover a paper, an important official document, which Mr. Crumpler had stolen from my father's office in London. I did not find it, and it may be thought that I took these horrible means to save my father from ruin. For the whole story is bound to come out if Mr. Jermyn does as he threatened, and if my cousin indeed knows all these facts, to save himself as Mr. Jermyn's accomplice, he'd say all he knows against me. And again and again my father has told me that the loss of this paper, if it were known in high places, would ruin his career for ever. So now you see in what a terrible position I stand ! And, indeed, indeed, I don't know but that

you were right after all, and that I had better accuse Mr. Jermyn before he accuses me ! "

The voice that answered her startled her by its harshness, by its air of command, and in spite of both by its wistful note of appeal.

" No, no ! Don't do that ! Let me think ! Let me think ! "

They went on side by side in the darkness. The rain still fell, but less heavily now, and along the distant horizon, seen over the top of the hedgerow, there lay a gleam of light. Presently, they knew, it would broaden and spread until the gloom of blackness over their heads would be broken up and irradiated by the summer stars. So they moved forward, as in an allegory, the significance of which was known as yet to only one.

When they were nearing the village Demetrius, who had marched along conscious that the girl was pressing ever more closely to him, was startled in the midst of his thinking by hearing her break into a little woeful sob.

" What is it ? " he cried with more of yearning tenderness in his voice than he knew.

Josian grasped his arm.

" Oh, Demetrius, I'm unhappy ! What shall I have to do ? I'd sooner die than marry that hateful wretch, and yet I don't want to die either—not in that way at least. I don't want to ruin my father. I don't want to harm you ! I wish I had left the house when I meant to, and then Mr. Jermyn couldn't have thought of this horrible thing ! "

Demetrius drew back, trembling. In another moment, fired by that dear propinquity, he would have clasped her in his arms. When he had steadied his voice he said :

" Miss Trehane, for God's sake, don't be so distressed ! I think I have found a way out for you."

Her sobs, checked by the apparent coldness that had gone before the ardent words, changed to a gasp of surprise, thinly shot through with delight.

" You have ? Without my being bound to do either of these detestable things ? "

" Yes. I have thought of a way."

" Oh, Demetrius ! "

They had stopped short in the roadway. Now he moved forward again, she following him.

" Please tell me ! " she urged.

" I can't do that yet. But will you trust yourself to me ? " He had stopped again, and she knew that he was trying to see

her face in the darkness. " I mean, will you do exactly as I tell you without remembering that I am only a servant who has no right to ask such things of you at all ? "

She caught her breath in a fluttering gasp, half of pleasure, half of pain. And withal she was awed, more than she understood at the time, by the solemnity that thrilled and sweetened in his voice. The moment had a touch of sanctity in it, by reason of the silence around them and the darkness overhead. Yet, on the horizon, the band of light was spreading fast.

Josian felt for his hand, but failed to find it, and he would not help her.

" Will you promise this ? " she heard him ask again.

And in a subdued voice, the attraction of his personality too powerful to be diminished by the coolness of his manner, she gave the promise he asked of her, gave it freely and out of a full heart. She heard him draw his breath deeply, and from that moment their positions were reversed. Demetrius, the servant, took the lead, she, the mistress, followed trustfully wherever he should take her.

To him, as to her, the change was apparent. He felt her resting with confidence upon his newly found strength, and the assurance sent him into a state of exaltation that raised him above his weariness and sickness and despair, and at the same time threw him in the humblest service at her feet. He moved, for the time, in a degree of ecstasy wherein all moral and spiritual personal considerations were no more heeded than were the stones on the road that lacerated his foot at frequent intervals. Pain, and the promise of pain indeed ; but subjugated nearly into non-existence by the refining influence of a selfless love.

As to Josian herself, she resigned her will and judgment very willingly to him, seeing no clear light on her own account, and shrinking a little from her father's possible attitude. For she had no reason to regard him as sympathetic or mindful of any other interest save his own. He might give counsel ; she hardly expected commiseration or compassion ; help, but no pity.

It was not until they had come to the bend of the road, and were approaching the village, that Demetrius's sublimated mood to be true to itself must needs descend to the commonplace.

" We will go to the inn," he said, " and see if we can get a vehicle to Dorchester at once."

Josian made no comment on this change of plan.

But there was to be no setting forth from the *Black Bear* for

them that night. A few moments either way and they would have run into the enemy's arms. As it was, they came to the inn, standing vaguely illumined by a few lighted windows, at the precise moment when the door was opened to discover to their eyes a familiar figure. The light from a lamp in the passage showed them Silas Drenchard standing in the doorway.

Demetrius caught Josian back quickly, and the two remained in the shadows, hugging the wall of the house within a few yards of him. As they waited there, not daring to move a step one way or the other, Drenchard, whom restlessness more than any other reason had driven down to the inn, spoke to some one over his shoulder.

"At ten o'clock, mind! Miss Trehane will be leaving the Tower then."

"Very good, sir. The yaller shay, at ten o'clock."

Drenchard remained standing in the lamp-lit doorway. Then they saw him clap his hat on his head and step into the night air. Josian's hand stiffened on her companion's arm. She felt his answering grip. For a moment she sickened with the suspense, then he felt her drooping body revive elastically as Drenchard, after a moment or two of aimless wandering about, re-entered the inn.

"No news of that fellow Jordan yet, I suppose?" he called out with a sulky aggrieved air, and the door closed upon both questioner and answer.

Josian drew a long breath.

"We can't go there," she said.

Demetrius did not reply until they were well away from the inn.

"No," he said then. "Not if you are to reach your father as soon as possible. They would stop us both. For myself it would not make much difference. But you must not fall into Mr. Jermyn's hands again. There is a better plan. We apparently have still a few hours' grace, since they haven't discovered your escape yet. And I think we may take advantage of it. We will go to Furmedge's."

"Yes?"

"You will be able to rest for a little while, and as soon as it is light, he will drive us into the town."

"Good!" said Josian. "Yes; I like that plan. But why do you always speak of me, and never seem to think about yourself at all?"

There was a short pause. Then he answered with a curious lightness of tone :

" Oh, I have a plan for myself too, Miss Trehane."

" I hope," said Josian, taking courage from the darkness, " that now you are free, your life is going to be a happier one, Demetrius."

" I believe that the rest of my life is going to be very happy," he answered.

Josian sighed into the darkness.

" You deserve it," she said. " Will you tell me one thing, please ? "

" If I can."

" Mr. Jermyn spoke as though he had some power of an unpleasant sort over you. Was it true ? Has he ? "

" He has none."

" I knew it was a lie ! "

" Forgive me, 'tis I who am not quite truthful," said Demetrius, staring ahead. " There was a time, not so very long ago, when Mr. Jermyn could undoubtedly have done me a great deal of harm. But that time has passed. He cannot hurt me now, and in a few hours' time he will not be able to hurt or to threaten you."

" How good you are ! What should I have done to-night without you ? And what a night it has been ! Oh, Demetrius, how tired and hungry I am ! Will Barjona give us some supper, do you think ? "

The commonplace question induced Demetrius to speak of something that had been in his mind for some time past. At the gate of the tranter's cottage he paused with his hand on the latch.

" Miss Trehane," he began, carefully withdrawing from his voice any shade of intimacy, " you have been good enough this evening to treat me as an equal. But while we are in Barjona's cottage, and for the rest of the time we are together will you please remember that I am only your uncle's servant, and that for the time being you are my mistress ? "

" Oh, Demetrius, I can't do that now ! "

" You promised to do all that I asked," he reminded her.

" And you expect me to treat you like a servant ? "

" I do. I think your father would wish it."

Josian understood. Much of the embarrassment of their companionship would be removed if they showed themselves as merely mistress and man. It was a point which, in the many excitements of the night, she herself had forgotten, nor, in her

abiding gratitude, which seemed crowned by this final act of delicacy on his part, was it one which greatly appealed to her for its own sake. But since he pressed it with so much earnestness she gave in to his judgment once more.

" Oh, very well," she said, with apparent carelessness. Then, as he held the gate open while she passed in, " What a fine servant you are, who issue your orders like a lord ! "

XXXVI

THE LIVING SACRIFICE

THE tranter was still up, and the little homely room, lit by a single candle, into which the wayfarers stepped looked singularly cheerful and pleasant to the girl. But when the door had been shut, and she turned instinctively towards her companion, she received a shock, which kept her dumb while he was explaining gravely to Furmedge some details of their flight.

Was this the one on whose strength and judgment she had leant so confidently during the night—this wreck of a young man, whose eyes shone with a strange brilliancy, and whose mouth was drawn and wan, who was bareheaded, dishevelled, stained and torn? There were blood marks on his wristbands, and bruises on his face. She regarded him with scarcely less wonder than did the honest tranter himself. If she had loved him less, she would have felt that her case was hopeless indeed, since this wretched scarecrow was all that stood advisedly between herself and despair.

Meanwhile, Demetrius, with the most natural manner in the world, was informing Barjona that Miss Trehane, having been insulted by her uncle's guest during the old gentleman's illness, had been forced to leave the house in secret, and had availed herself of his own help in order to do so. It was her wish to reach her father at Dorchester as soon as possible. Could Barjona undertake to drive the pair of them into town early the next morning?

The tranter, recovering slowly from his astonishment, readily promised his assistance, and asked no questions save with his rounded eyes. Whereupon Demetrius, relieved from that anxiety, turned his attention to matters more immediately concerning Josian's comfort.

"A snack o' supper an' a bed for the young leädy?" he said.

" Ay, I can manage thik, 'tes true, in a way. But 'tesn't the fare she be used to."

" Anything will do," said Josian wearily.

The strain of the evening was beginning to tell upon her, and as she sat by the fire which the tranter had lit in order that she might dry her damp skirts, she felt that she would like nothing so much in the world as to fall upon Demetrius's shoulder and cry her heart out in that protective haven. Such an outlet to her emotion being denied her, she found an equivalent in becoming out of temper, particularly in regard to the young man himself. The climax of her hysterical irritation was reached when the tranter called them to the table whereon he had placed his homely fare.

Josian took her seat eagerly with a healthy appetite. But Demetrius, in whom, in truth, hunger had passed from the acute stage into a sick distaste for food, persisted in remaining in a corner until she, as mistress, should have finished her meal, He had covered his face with his hands, but she knew that his eyes, steady as the candle-light, were watching her between his fingers. Compassion, love, and annoyance swayed her from mood to mood, but at the last, when she left the table which for his sake she did very soon, tenderness prevailed, and drove her to his side. The tranter was in the back premises, preparing a second candle.

" Good night, Demetrius "

He raised his head. The curious exaltation in his look startled her.

" Good night, ma'am."

She dropped her hand on to his shoulder, and spoke his name again with soft remonstrance. Why keep up this silly farce when they were alone ? He rose at her touch, thus compelling her to remove it. He looked her steadily in the face.

" Good night ; I hope you will sleep well, ma'am," he said. " We shall start quite early."

She left him without another word—half angry, half tearful, wholly yearning. At the door the tranter met her with a rush-light. She beckoned him to the foot of the narrow stairs.

" For Heaven's sake," she whispered, " look after Demetrius ; he is quite ill."

" Poor lad ! " Barjona said, the light of the candle flickering over a pair of troubled faces.

" I think you're fond of him, aren't you, Barjona ? "

"The Lard knows I be, miss."

Josian sighed tremulously, envying such open expression of feeling.

"Call me very early, Barjona."

"I will so, miss."

They parted, Josian soon to lose her troubles and perplexities in healthy young sleep, the tranter to renew his for awhile in the company of Demetrius.

At first his homely advances and rustic amenities were received with a kind of abstracted apathy, but at length the young man roused himself, made a feint of eating, swallowed a mug of cider, and began to respond to the tranter's hospitality.

"Yes, that will do quite well," he said with an indifferent glance, as Furmedge piled a truss of hay in a corner and spread a coat over it. "But I can't sleep just yet. I want to write a letter. Can you give me anything to write with?"

After some rummaging the tranter produced an antiquated inkhorn and a quill that the original owner would have been ashamed to recognize, Demetrius supplementing these by a sheet of paper whereon Robert Crumpler had once traced some culinary directions. Sitting down with these before him he began his letter, writing slowly and with long pauses of thought, Furmedge, meanwhile, dozing in front of the dying fire. When he had finished, the writer folded the paper, awoke the tranter to ask for wax or wafer, accepted a smear of resin in place of either, and having thus secured the letter put it into his pocket. Then, urged by the anxious Furmedge, he lay down on the improvised bed, and affected slumber as a cloak for his own thoughts.

It was already growing towards morning before the change in the weather which he had foreseen overnight cleared the skies of clouds, and permitted a faint translucent grey presently to replace the lowering blue-black of the earlier hours. Before the darkness had been swept from the obscure corners of the room the tranter was stirring, and Demetrius, who had sought unconsciousness in vain, rose from his couch of hay, and followed the other out to the pump in the yard. When he had put himself in order with the rudimentary means that served for the tranter he set to work to get out the horse and cart while Furmedge prepared breakfast.

He had fed and harnessed the horse, and was sitting under the cider trees when the other came out to him, dressed in his best

clothes, with hair and boots equally well oiled and a chin red from the razor.

"Have you called my mistress yet?" Demetrius asked as Furmedge joined him.

"She'll be down in a jiffy, lad. An' till she coomes, seeen as 'tes the Lard's day, han't ye a mind to open out your heart to Him in prayer?"

"The Lord knows all that is in my heart, Barjona, and shall judge of it aright. There's no need for me to open it in words. Besides, my brain is on fire; I could not pray."

"You'm in trouble, lad?"

"Don't ask me! Think of me as kindly as you can, but for God's sake let me go my way alone!"

"'Tes a pore business, carryen your griefs alone, a' reckon."

"You're right there. But sometimes it has to be."

The tranter laid his broad hand on the heaving shoulder with a touch as gentle as a woman's.

"Ben't there no woone on earth as can help 'ee, lad?"

"No."

"Then there's al'ays Woone above."

Demetrius rose quickly.

"Oh, Barjona," he cried, "why are you making it so hard for me?"

"Me, lad?" cried the tranter. But Demetrius had dashed away, and after watching him awhile, as he leant with bent head and covered face over the wall of lettered tombstones, Furmedge shook his own head in affectionate sorrow and returned to the house.

Five minutes later Josian came down, blooming in her torn muslin like a rose in an untidy garden. The night's rest had done wonders with this healthy young woman. The day was fine, and the tranter, who did a little odd cobbling for his poorer customers, had found her a pair of shoes that fitted tolerably well. Her spirits had risen buoyantly upon the sea of her misfortunes. Had not Demetrius assured her that these were practically ended, and could she not trust him? To be sure her uncle Crumpler lay dead, and Demetrius was ill. But the one had been an old man and the other was a young one. . . . She marvelled at the tranter's troubled looks.

He kept her out of the garden and before long Demetrius came in to lay the meal for her in the front room. He showed no trace of his recent agitation, and, beyond the pallor of his

face and subdued, almost abstracted manner, appeared before her much as usual. He maintained their ostensible relations with as great a rigour as on the previous evening. In the broad daylight, with Barjona Furmedge moving in and out, Josian made no attempt to break through his self-imposed restrictions. But she tolerated them with a better humour, and in her heart dwelt on his tender considerations with delight.

The day was still very young when they took their places in the cart which the tranter had drawn up outside the cottage. Josian sprang up into the seat which her father had once occupied, at the side of the driver. Demetrius seated himself at the back of the cart and thus saw in perspective an ever diminishing view of the village which held the only home that, in his present consciousness, he had ever known. He kept his eyes upon it as long as there remained anything of it in sight, and when it had been left behind, and all danger of interference by Jermyn's orders had been passed, he still remained gazing back and living over in his shortened memory the chief events of that brief existence.

The journey was accomplished without mishap or unusual incident of any kind. Josian relapsed into silence under her companion's taciturnity, and presently no sound came from the moving vehicle save the grinding of the wheels in the dust and the tranter's perfunctory, " C'lk, Dobbin ! " from time to time. The air, as they travelled between hedgerows, was sweet with the scent of honeysuckle and heavy with the murmurous hum of bees around the bramble blossoms. Recent rain had freshened the country-side and cleared the atmosphere, so that distant objects sprang into prominence with a startling disproportion of detail, and the time until they were reached seemed unduly long. The empty meadows stood transitionally between the labour of Saturday and the continued activities of Monday. Once or twice a wayfarer passed the time o' day, but Barjona Furmedge was too well known on these roads for his presence at any hour to excite much comment.

At length the spires and roofs of the county town rose in a glittering array, like a kind of humbler New Jerusalem, into the clear air, and the sense of solitude, which had wrapped the dreaming girl round and made all wonderful things seem on the point of fulfilment, gave way before the suggestion of oncoming civilization. She roused herself with a little sigh.

" We're nearly there," she said.

" Another mile, missy."

The mile was passed, and the first cottages of the town reached. Josian drew back the canvas that screened off the interior of the cart, to call through to Demetrius at the other end. She found that he had left his earlier position and was now lying at full length on the floor of the cart, his upturned face within a few inches of her own. She let the curtain fall.

" He is asleep," she whispered, softly as a mother who fears to awaken the child in her arms.

Furmedge stirred heavily.

" I'd best wake en, miss."

Josian kept her hand on the canvas.

" No ; give him a little longer. He must be very tired. I'll do it when we stop."

A few minutes later the tranter drew up outside the *White Hart*, and, descending, went to the horse's head for a moment. It was her chance, her last chance, she told herself. She slipped quietly behind the canvas letting it fall into its place again, and knelt down on the floor of the cart. The interior was musty with the faded scents of half a generation of heterogeneous cargo, but at the farther end the curtains had been looped back and the place was as light as a room.

Demetrius lay extended from tail-board to shafts, his head pillowed upon one arm, the other fallen flaccid by his side. He was still unconscious, wrapped in the heavy sleep of physical exhaustion ; his breathing was full and deep. So, by a curious sequence of events, he had come back, in like manner as he had left, to the starting-point of this his second life.

The sinister analogy was unperceived by the nescience of the girl, so that the moment gained in tenderness what it lost in effect. Here, in the partial seclusion of a dusty carrier's cart, she threw her all upon her last stake. In five minutes more the conventions of the world, as typified by the austerity of her father, would have closed around them once more. In his waking moments he was infinitely remote ; in his sublime unconsciousness he was nearer to her than her own heart.

Greatly daring, she overshadowed him with her own bright face, and kissed him on the lips.

He was stirring before she had moved well away, almost before the blood had reached her forehead. But his eyes opened slowly, for sleep still clung to him and, long deferred, was not to be shaken off in a moment. Josian sat back, composing herself, and watching him. A shaft of sunlight found its way in through

a crack in the canvas and fell across his whitened patch of hair.

He came to full consciousness, raised himself, and looked at her.

"I was asleep. I thought something touched me," he said.

Josian was silent, playing nervously with a flower in her dress.

"Are we at Dorchester?"

"Yes."

He scrambled to his knees and looked out.

"I didn't think yesterday that I should be back so soon."

He passed his hand across his forehead, drew a deep breath and sprang down from the cart.

"You will find it easier to get out from the front, miss," he called back.

Josian turned away quickly to hide her tears.

"Don't wait!" she said, biting her lips. "I can get down without you."

"Very good, miss." And he moved away.

A minute later she joined the two men in the roadway.

"My father is at the *King's Arms*," she said, not looking at Demetrius, although the remark was directly addressed to him. "I will go there at once."

"Do you wish me to come with you, miss?" he asked.

"If you please."

Having ascertained that the tranter would wait for him at this spot, Demetrius set off after Josian, who was already walking up the street. From the door of the one inn to the other he maintained a distance of several paces between himself and her. To the love-lorn, mortified girl this observance was for once grateful. To have had him at her side just then, while the blush was still on her cheek and the tears in her eyes, would have been unbearable.

Outside the *King's Arms* they paused. Josian turned round. Up and down the long slanting street the townsfolk were loitering and gossiping in their Sunday clothes. The bells had not yet begun to ring for morning service, and a great hush seemed to have fallen upon the town.

The street lay in sunshine from end to end.

"I think you will be safe now, Miss Trehane," said Demetrius.

"Indeed I feel so! Will you come in and see my father?"

"Not now. I have something to say to Barjona."

"But you are coming back?"

" Yes, miss, presently."

It was the sole deception which he used. With that assurance, Josian, relieved from the immediate embarrassment of parting or gratitude, turned with a gay wave of her hand and entered the inn. When he had seen the last flutter of her white dress he turned and slowly retraced his steps.

Barjona Furmedge had gathered a small crowd about him before the door of the *White Hart*, and was holding forth in his earnest unlettered way. Apparently he had taken as his text the amorous proclivities of the walking-out couples who were loitering, with Sabbath sheepishness, on the bridge near at hand.

" Carry your loves to the Saviour's feet," he cried, " an' lay 'em down there! 'Tesn't no use else. There'll never be no blessen 'pon 'em till ye've burnt 'em with sacrifice, and made 'em like the pure gold on Solomon's girt iv'ry throne as was rounded behind an' overlaid wi' the precious metal. Burn 'em in the fire o' onselfishness and make 'em into a sweet-smellen garland for the Lard as did put such ripe treasures into the breasts o' sinful men. . . ."

Demetrius stood aside and waited until a diminishing congregation induced the preacher to stay his words, and he came up to the young man wiping his forehead. His eyes rested affectionately on the quiet face.

" An' now, my lad," he said, " a' reckon ye'd best be getten home along. 'Tesn't the safest pleäce for 'ee here."

" I'm not going back with you, Barjona."

" Ah! Ye'll be getten some fine job along wi' missy's feyther."

" No; I have my own plans. That's another thing—I want you to go up there presently and tell Miss Trehane that I am not coming back as she expects."

" Well, maybe ye knows your business best, lad. But 'tes mighty queer your gooen off like thik, an' 'tes a thing I don't like neither."

" I can't help it. It has to be. You'll not lose sight of me altogether. I mean you'll hear of me again."

" I'm sure I hopes so, lad. But ben't there nothen I can do for 'ee else? "

" Yes; two things."

" Then 'tes so good as done!" cried the tranter heartily.

" Will you promise that on your oath as a Christian man? "

" So sure as God hears me, lad, I promise 'ee."

" Barjona . . . I . . . well, thank you ! God bless you, Barjona ! God help me ! It's this : can you read writing ? "

" If 'tes plain an' simple-like."

Demetrius took out the letter which he had written overnight.

" I have written it very plainly, and I think you will be able to understand it," he said as he held it out.

" Lard sake ! " cried Furmedge, staring at it without taking it. " Whatever can 'ee hev to write to I as ye can't say wi' your lips, lad ? "

Demetrius thrust it into his hand.

" I have written," he explained, " because you are not to open that letter before a year has passed."

The tranter fingered it tentatively and stared.

" A year ? " he gasped.

" A full year. On no account, before. You have sworn it, you know. And, remember, I shall trust you."

" Oh, my dear lad," cried Furmedge, tears in his honest eyes, " if so little a thing can make 'ee happy in any sart, I'll swear it again to 'ee. Not on no account will I open en afore a year's gone by."

" Thank you ; that's a great relief to me. I can rest content with that. The other thing I'm afraid you'll find a little harder, but for both our sakes it must be done. It is this—and you have already promised, you know ; you are not to try to see me again."

Before the mandate, which was given with an effort so well concealed that the tranter did not perceive the strain, the other stood aghast.

" Not to see 'ee no mwore ! " he stammered out.

Demetrius shook a resolute head.

" You have passed your word, and you can't go back from it," he said. " A Christian man never breaks his oath."

" If I a-known what 'twas ye was after——"

" I know better than you in this, dear friend ! I know what I am asking, and why I ask it. I can't explain, but this I'll tell you. Another meeting after we have parted to-day would only cause the greatest pain to both of us. For the sake of the affection which you have so generously given me, spare me that ! "

The emotion which he had so carefully concealed throughout the distressing interview broke through his defences at his last words, and so shook the man at his side that he yielded to the weakness what he had been inclined to contravene to the strength.

" Don't 'ee say no mwore, lad," he protested huskily. " If

'tes in any sart o' way for thy good, I'll not try to see 'ee again—though I pray as the Lard'll see fit to bring us together in His wown good time."

" Thank you, Barjona. You have eased my mind a great deal. If you can hold me in your kindly remembrance . . . good-bye, old friend . . . and God bless you ! "

" And you, too, my lad."

Scarcely caring to conceal his growing emotion, the tranter held out his hand. For the last time Demetrius hesitated.

" Nay, lad, nay," cried the other fervently, " if any stain were ever there, the Lamb's blood an' thy own tears hev washed it out long ago ! An' for my own part I say as I don't b'lieve 'twas ever there ! "

" Barjona, Barjona," cried Demetrius, snatching his hand out of the other's grasp, " you will break my heart indeed ! "

They were his last words. He broke away after uttering them, and by an agitated gesture forbade the tranter to follow him. But when, after wiping his own eyes, Furmedge presently set off up the street, ostensibly on his errand to Josian, Demetrius, having once more gained the mastery over himself, came back into the public way. He approached one of the loungers on the bridge, and, having asked for and obtained a certain direction, followed his late companion briskly up the street. Arrived at a particular point, he turned off to the right and, in spite of the cold shivering of his humanity, went boldly on.

Before the gate of the gaol a man was standing, a cast-iron model of discipline and immobility. To him Demetrius spoke a few words.

" Mr. Robert Crumpler of Bindon Abbey has been murdered," he said. " My name is Demetrius Jordan. I wish to give myself up for the crime."

The other stared for a moment. But discipline prevailed, and he marched the prisoner in without a word.

PART III

WHAT HE REMEMBERED

XXXVII

FIAT LUX

THERE was a certain corner of the prison yard that seemed by common consent to be left quieter and more unoccupied than the rest of the dreary place. It was here that Demetrius, holding aloof from the rough amusements of his fellow prisoners, spent much of his time in the days before his condemnation. He occupied himself chiefly in reading Barjona Furmedge's shabby Bible and in thinking of Josian Trehane.

On the whole these were quiet days, which but for the indispensable conditions would not have been unpleasant. The very monotony and necessary routine of the place were soothing to a mind which had suffered such penetrating emotions within the last few weeks. Discipline among the prisoners was lax rather than firm, and Demetrius, though in one particular he formed an unenviable exception to the rest, otherwise benefited by the general slackness of the prevailing penal system. Once released from the cells where they slept unhealthily overcrowded, they were left very much to themselves during the day, with the result that gaming, drinking and ribald conversation flourished out of the earth, while complacency looked down from the Governor's windows.

It seemed that on the occasion of his former imprisonment Demetrius had given the turnkeys some trouble. This was now remembered against him, and he had been ordered into irons within an hour of his second admittance. At first the weight of these was not insupportable, but as the days went by he had a curious impression that the chains became heavier and more irksome, when by all precedence a greater familiarity should have lessened the encumbrance.

In the early days of his detention it had struck him as strange that a condition of life so dissimilar to his recent experience,

yet lived through before at no great lapse of time, should strike no chord of remembrance within his deadened memory. But presently, as he received no sign out of his own consciousness, he ceased to wonder about it, and accepted the existing circumstances with an abstracted docility which, save for cast-iron prejudice, might well have earned him remission of the aggravation of his penalty.

In such a community it was inevitable that his story should be quickly known. He was not the only prisoner charged with a capital offence, undoubtedly, but he was the only one who had entered the prison for the second time by way of the hangman's noose. The fact drew the eyes of this circumscribed public upon him, officials going even to the length of making a charge to outsiders for admittance to the yard in order to look at so remarkable a young man. Had he been of a coarser calibre, Demetrius could speedily have made himself a sort of hedge-king of the prison yard. But as the spectators got nothing for their sixpences but the sight of a young man reading a book in a quiet corner, and as his fellow prisoners never once succeeded in inducing him to head a mutiny, he soon parted with these equivocal opportunities, and his reputation, as far as the enforced inmates were concerned, underwent a change.

His loss of memory became known. The prejudice created by any abnormal quality was further helped on in his case by the unnatural aspect of a whitened head on youthful shoulders, and the half-dreamy, wholly impenetrable aloofness with which he moved among his companions. In less than a month he was held to be mad, the coarser grained among them stating the belief with unmitigated frankness, the more superstitious regarding the supposed affliction as the finger of God laid upon him in retribution for his many crimes.

It would seem that the report must have spread to the outside of the prison, for in due time Demetrius found himself summoned before a grave gentleman, who put many questions to him, and at the end of the interview dismissed him with pursed lips, and an almost imperceptible shake of the head. Once again his solitude was so disturbed : this time by a business-like man whom he took to be a lawyer, who put certain questions to him, but to whom Demetrius had nothing to say. Thereafter, the prisoner was left alone alike by his companions and by the outer world.

This spiritual isolation pleased him. It was what he had aimed at in his last interview with Barjona Furmedge, as most calcu-

lated to ensure that serenity of mind with which he hoped to meet his coming ordeal. Nor did tidings of any sort leak through the walls of his prison house. There were no distractions, beyond a very natural and somewhat wistful wondering, to come between him and his God.

In these days, and more especially after his condemnation, as his physical strength abated until he could scarcely drag himself, for the weight of the chains, across the yard, a certain spirituality about him impressed the more susceptible of his companions. He grew more and more silent, reserved and unapproachable. Some said that he was afraid of death : others that he had passed beyond fear. The chaplain persuaded himself that he had made a penitent, but the head turnkey, in unofficial moments, gave it as his opinion that the young man so soon to stand upon the scaffold for the second time was innocent of both the ascribed crimes. However it might be, if at his former trial he had been chosen by Robert Crumpler for a St. Stephen, he might have stood for an Angel Gabriel now.

His case, owing to the lightness of the Calendar, was included at the next Assizes. He pleaded Guilty, and was Condemned to Death out of hand. The presiding judge took occasion to express the amazement and abhorrence that moved him in his duty of sentencing one so young and so utterly depraved. He, furthermore, slightly overstepped his office by exhorting the instruments of the law to do their work more thoroughly this time than on the former occasion, and, in order to ensure this, he directed that the prisoner should be hanged in chains, and his body subsequently exposed upon a gibbet within the borough at the point nearest to the scene of the crime.

It was after this that the full horror of his impending doom descended upon Demetrius. Hitherto he had been sustained, or had contrived to sustain himself, not by a possible hope of escape, but by a steady and strong-willed endeavour to ignore the future. This attitude he now found it impossible to maintain.

Ten days were to elapse before the carrying out of the sentence, and before the first was passed he felt that, if he were indeed to retain his sanity, it would be necessary to divert his mind from the horror of blackness that now lay in front as well as behind him. To do this, he must keep his thoughts fixed immovably upon some subject of lesser if of kindred importance.

Accordingly, he spent his waking hours by night and day in going over the various causes which had led to his present

situation, and in trying to determine whether what had occurred was, in truth, the inevitable result. He brought to the task a mind refined and trained by introspection and silence, and after many repetitions of the process came at length to the unalterable decision that the course which he had pursued was the only one possible.

The damning factor in any other suggested policy was his own discredit both as informer and witness. The word of a man who had already been half-hanged for one murder could scarcely be expected to carry weight in accusing an apparently disinterested gentleman of another. And the same objection held good with regard to Josian's story, he being the only witness—apart from Drenchard—whom she could produce to substantiate her somewhat improbable statement. Drenchard, who would necessarily fall under the accusation with Jermyn, might be trusted to swear anyone's life away in the hope of saving himself, and would go with the stronger party.

As matters stood, Jermyn's threat would be—had been, in point of fact—rendered ineffectual by Demetrius's voluntary surrender to the law. As an already convicted murderer, who, by the commission of this second crime had freed himself from the tyranny of a somewhat brutal master, he had from the first inception of his plan realized that Jermyn's accusation of Josian, even if put into practice, must fall to the ground in the face of his own acknowledgment of the crime. It was also probable that his impassioned appeal to Josian's father, if the facts came out, would be regarded as a criminally artful attempt to provide for his own subsequent safety.

No ; long and heavy brooding convinced him that he was not throwing his life away unnecessarily.

Such meditations filled out only half of the allotted period put to his existence in this world. By that time the subject was threadbare and afforded not the desired relief. With indomitable resolution he sought for something new. Over and through all his thoughts the sweet and gracious figure of his beloved moved continuously, but, as the time of his death drew near, he dared not dwell with too detailed a remembrance on that iridescent personality, lest the anguish which he was seeking to combat should overwhelm him and bear him to the ground.

The image of Barjona Furmedge, the only man who had shown him kindness in his servitude, presented itself as an alternative. But here the suggestion was altogether too specula-

tive to absorb his mind thoroughly. When he had agonized his soul by the contemplation of the tranter's unwilling belief in his present guilt, and endeavoured to soothe it by the anticipation of his year's hence exoneration by means of the letter which Furmedge would read too late to overthrow the writer's plans, there was nothing else to be done. The wells of thought were dry again, and needed refilling.

He had long ago reconstructed the crime of Jermyn and Drenchard, having guessed how the crime had been accomplished as soon as he made the discovery that the phial of poison had been tampered with. The loss of the poison itself was immaterial, since, from the moment when he had taken the crime upon himself, he had known that such means of anticipating his sentence would be unusable. He could not slip quietly out of life with his task scarcely begun, and later on the authorities would have rendered such an evasion of his penalty impossible. As it was, the abstraction of the poison formed one of the greatest proofs, had such been needed, in favour of his story.

Since, then, the recent crime afforded no point of interest calculated to distract his mind from his coming agony, he found himself thrown back upon the hidden episode of his former impeachment. The guilt, if guilt were his, had been repented of until even penitence was satisfied and lay down in very weariness. But now, in these last days, when his love for Josian had become so pure and impersonal a thing, he longed with an intensity that bade fair to undo all his efforts after peace to know himself worthy to offer her this sacrifice. A strict theologian would have carped at the attitude of a mind that felt itself at peace with its Maker, and yet desired the assurance of inward merit for the sake of an earthly deity. Demetrius himself was aware of no inconsistency.

He weighed the evidence against himself as he had learned it from Furmedge, sifting it carefully and with a clear-sightedness remarkable in such circumstances. For the next three days the matter was never out of his mind. But still no indisputable conviction came either to raise his spirit or to plunge him anew into a paroxysm of contrition and despair. On the eve of his execution he was as far from understanding his true relation to the murder of the man Prothero as he had been when Robert Crumpler had first hissed the accusation at him in the early days of his recovery.

Whether it was due to this constant dwelling upon the past,

thereby causing much of the present to appear the mere reflex of what had gone before, or whether, in truth, so much earnest straining of the numbed memory had awakened it to a certain poor activity, at this time Demetrius became conscious of a very slight but very subtle change in his mental powers. The evanescent flashes of thought which had troubled him from the first became more vivid and less elusive, though deliberate effort, as before, invariably drove them away. Once or twice he succeeded in catching what might have been either a broken memory or a tricky flight of overstrained imagination. And always it was, to his own surprise, the face of Jermyn that mocked him out of the darkness, with cynical lips smiling at untold things.

On the morning of the ninth day a new turnkey entered his cell. The fellow was heavily pock-marked, and his face struck Demetrius at once with a sense of familiarity, yet to his knowledge he had not seen him before. The man was not unfriendly, and grinned at sight of him.

"Hulloa!" he said. "They told me you was back. What d'ye mean by giving us the trouble of hanging you again?"

"Ah!" said Demetrius, "you were here when I was in prison before."

"'Course I was. No more o' your little capers this time, my hearty! What have you been doing to yourself? There's nothing of you! Lucky you're to hang in chains, my lad, or it 'ud take a month o' Sundays to turn you off proper. An' proper it'll have to be this time, I'll take my oath!"

The fellow had no intention of being brutal. It is probable that he thought his coarse pleasantries would enliven the prisoner. But the rough jest had done its work. The black horror ahead closed in upon the black horror of the past, and the soul of Demetrius was submerged beneath the two.

After his condemnation he had been removed from the common cell to share a smaller one in company with the two other felons in like case. During the daytime these still had the freedom of the yard, but on this last day Demetrius had no inclination to look more than was needful on the faces of his fellow men. At midday a coach came into the town bearing reprieves for his two companions, who were convicted upon less serious charges than his own. Learning this, he felt no pang of envy, only a sense of relief that he would now be left to pass his last night alone.

In the afternoon he was visited by the chaplain, who, finding

him less responsive than usual, went away with the impression that his penitent's heart had become hardened, whereas it was quivering with pain, ready to bleed at a touch. A want of sympathy resulted, and the man of God made no further attempt to break down the prisoner's reserve.

The empty hours had lagged with a cruel monotony, yet the night came all too soon. A few minutes before the prisoners were driven into their cells, a rumour floated round the yard, and, spreading evilly, reached the ears of the one most concerned. It had been brought in by a new arrival admitted into the prison that afternoon. He reported a vast influx of visitors to the town, drawn thither by the interest of the next day's execution. The customary hang-fair, it appeared, promised to be the largest and most profitable that had been known within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

Demetrius sickened as he listened to the revolting details. At length the door of his cell closed upon him with a noisy fixing of the bolts that would not be withdrawn until he was summoned to make his final appearance. A sudden terrible paralysis of thought and feeling left him duly wondering what had happened and where he was. When the tension relaxed—which it did in a few moments—he surprised himself by a violent fit of sobbing, in which the last remnants of a repressed hysteria found vent. When this, too, had passed, he remained for an hour or more in a sort of stupor, drowsing exhaustedly at times, and waking now and again to full consciousness with the horror of a fresh panic upon him.

At such times a ghastly power seemed to project himself outside the prison walls. Imagination filled in the blanks of ignorance. He sat rigid on his plank bed and staring with his tragic eyes into the darkness found it made hideous with his pictured thoughts. The hum of excitement brooding over the town, the crowded inns, the all-night workers at the booths and stalls, the curious anticipation of the morrow's sight, the careless jests and wagers—he understood it all. His brain seemed seething, his heart a coal of fire in a breast of ice. He could bear it no longer! He sprang up with a cry, and found the moisture dripping from quivering cheek on to trembling hand.

That phase passed in its turn. Exhaustion set in. He grew strangely indifferent to his fate, ready to face it with an unnatural stoicism that was neither courage nor despair. Presently he lay down again, and in the same apathetic mood fell asleep.

At midnight he was awakened by a reiterated sound which had operated so insidiously on his sleeping brain that at first he was hardly aware that his waking was not perfectly natural. The continued sound won recognition at length, and he sat up to listen.

Some one was hammering. Not very close at hand, although the thickness of the walls might be answerable for the muffled nature of the sound. Why were they hammering in the dead of the night? he asked himself perplexedly.

Then, in a flash, he knew.

At the thought, the cold sweat broke out once more. He stretched forth his hands as if to keep off the horrid thing. Then, rising as it were from the depths of his soul, a great conviction rushed upon him, swirling spirit and mind alike in one vast emotional cataclysm, out of which there sprang an articulate cry—"*I have lived through this moment before!*"

The cells of memory had opened once again, and now there was no instantaneous closing. But instead, while he waited, trembling under a new sensation, light, the light for which he had longed and prayed, flooded in upon him, clear and vivid and joyous, for in that moment all doubts and bewilderments were burnt away by that blessed radiance, and, looking back over the illumined path of his past, he knew the truth at last—knew himself worthy to lay his sacrifice at his dear one's feet.

The face which had haunted and mocked him in his present misery was the face of the man for the sake of whose unspilt blood they had hanged him five months ago—Jermyn or Prothero, his friend and his betrayer.

In the irony of his discovery he might have hated or he might have despaired. But he did neither of these things. He fell on his knees with a sob of joy; the black horror rolled back on either side, and his soul was full of peace.

XXXVIII

RECONSTRUCTION

WHEN young Demetrius Matravers went up to London on the death of his father he carried with him a pure heart, a good deal of sorrow, and a vast amount of inexperience. He was then in his twenty-second year.

The sorrow was for the untoward ending of the careless good-humoured generous man whom he had loved with a deep affection, and who, on his side, had never given him an ill word and had allowed him to have his own way in everything. As Demetrius's desires had never tended to harm either himself or others, there was less evil in such a system of upbringing than might, at first sight, appear. The chief resultant—and if mischief lay anywhere it was here—was the undue confidence and lack of intuition with which the fatherless and unpractical lad attacked the great world.

If his father's suicide had come upon him with a shock, the condition of affairs as detailed to him by the family lawyers was a revelation. For days after he had been assured that he had inherited nothing but a mortgaged estate, and an overwhelming pile of debts, he found the information as incredible as it was unpalatable. An open-handed generosity had marked Sir Lucius's progress through life, and, confidential though he had always seemed to be in his relations with his son, he had never let fall any hint of financial embarrassments. These, as Demetrius now remorsefully understood, must have been considerably helped on to the fatal crisis by his own innocent extravagances.

He had no thought of reproach for the indulgent father who, finding the crash inevitable, had cut the knot of his perplexities by sending a bullet through his brain, thus leaving his only son to struggle through the ensuing difficulties as best he might.

When, by the advice of the lawyers, the estate and personal property had been sold, and the debts—by Demetrius's own

desire—been paid up to the last penny, the lad headed for London with fifty guineas in his pocket, and no very clear idea of how to turn them into five hundred. Life had hitherto run for him in too comfortable and sequestered places for ambition to have made itself felt. He recognized no special talent; moreover, he was still very young.

Left to himself, as Demetrius undoubtedly was, it was almost inevitable that such a lad should make mistakes. His initial one was the seeking out of his former friend, Eustace Prothero.

Prothero was several years his senior; a fact which in itself recommended him to the youthful seeker after fortune. Added to which, he possessed the advantage of a smooth, suave style, a boasted experience of men and women, and a reputation in certain circles—all of which the country-bred youth was ready to take at their own face value.

The two young men had been introduced by a common friend during Demetrius's first year at Oxford, and, later, Prothero had been invited down to Court Matravers, where, as events turned out, his new friend got small diversion from his society—Prothero spending most of his time in long solitary rides about the country, neither asking nor appearing to desire Demetrius's company.

It was natural, when the tide of fortune turned so roughly against him, that the young fellow should carry his inexperience to the only man whom he believed capable of helping him. Prothero being what he was, and Demetrius being possessed of fifty guineas, it was equally natural that the lad was received by the elder man with open arms. Within three days Demetrius was enlarging his knowledge of men and manners under Prothero's doubtful tutelage. He was speedily voted a novitiate member of the notorious Fast and Loose Club, an institution so little to his liking that he quitted it before he was entitled to a full membership.

Before long, most of his guineas had contrived to slip from his pockets into those of Prothero, and he was receiving many valuable hints on the art of living by one's wits, which seemed to the guileless lad very much the same as preying upon other people. He told his mentor so with some heat of language, and Prothero's disgust at such ingratitude occasioned the first rupture between them. At the end of their friendly intercourse, which was brought to a sudden and dramatic termination, Demetrius emerged with some shattered illusions as to the general honour

and virtue of mankind, a better knowledge of his friend in particular, and a heart smarting a little under these discoveries, but still unvitiated by Prothero's influence. He could, at any period of his short career, have looked his dead father in the face and have asserted truthfully that he had done no wrong.

By the time that he was becoming aware of Prothero's grave defects as adviser and helper, the elder man was beginning to grow tired of a raw youth who declined to mask his rawness with a layer of worldly veneer. The acquaintance, which had never been a friendship in the best sense of the word, was already flagging to stagnation, having lasted rather less than a year, when a certain event sent the course of affairs into an unexpected channel. The way for this was paved by an occurrence of some interest in the light of subsequent events.

It chanced that one day Demetrius, still sharing lodgings with Prothero, came into their sitting-room and found his companion reading a letter. He took no notice of the circumstance until a change of position gave him a view of the cover, on which, to his excessive surprise and annoyance, he read the name which he had adopted in place of his own. In a moment he had snatched the missive out of the other's grasp.

" Confound you ! " he cried. " What the devil are you doing ? That belongs to me ! "

Prothero laughed his easy, silky laugh.

" Don't get into a temper, my dear fellow," he said. " It's of no great importance, I assure you."

" You'll please leave me to judge of that ! " cried Demetrius, his anger running high.

" Certainly I will. And yourself as well, until you're in a better humour ! " Prothero retorted, and walked from the room.

Left to himself, Demetrius found that in one respect Prothero was right. The letter, which had been forwarded to him from the club, to which he still nominally belonged, was, on the face of it, so unimportant as scarcely to justify Prothero's interference from his own point of view. It was a formal letter from a stranger requesting the favour of his interest at the Fast and Loose Club on behalf of the writer who desired to become a member. He had addressed Demetrius on account of his declared Dorset birth, being himself a Dorset man and relying, apparently, upon the clannishness which has ever existed among the men of that robust county. The letter was signed " S. Drenchard,"

Demetrius, being out of temper at the moment, and more concerned about his own shaky prospects than interested in introducing any compatriot to a place where assuredly he would learn no good, flung the letter aside and thought no more about the matter. But a few weeks later, having in the meanwhile improved his knowledge of Prothero's ways and views, the circumstance was recalled to his mind by a chance reference of the elder man. He learned that Prothero had gone out of his way to cultivate the acquaintance which he himself had neglected to form.

At the time he scarcely gave a second thought to the matter. He had seen enough of life as exemplified by Prothero and his friends, and was then turning his attention to the serious task of earning money. It was only when the prospect of honest employment relieved his mind from immediate anxiety that he began to reproach himself with what a somewhat tender conscience now regarded as the possible neglect of a moral duty. He decided to seek out the young man Drenchard and warn him against the dangerous society of Eustace Prothero. There was no disloyalty in this, or he would have hesitated with the best of motives at his back. But by this time he and his former friend had parted company with an exchange of hot words on the one side and cool sarcasms on the other.

Demetrius visited the club, which he had not entered for some months. As chance would have it, young Drenchard, now a novitiate member, was not present that evening. But as usual Prothero was there. He greeted Demetrius with a look of insolent contempt, and the lad, burning with indignation, stood for a few moments watching from a little distance the particular table where Prothero was seated with some three or four others.

A game of cards was in progress—a game of the accomplished scoundrel's own invention—and before long Demetrius was not surprised to discover as an onlooker what as a player he had long ago suspected. In a moment he was across the room and attracting the attention of every one in it.

" I denounce this man as a cheat ! " he cried, laying his hand on Prothero's shoulder.

Confusion followed as a matter of course. Demetrius saw nothing but the enraged face of the man whom he had accused of the one misdemeanour which would earn him expulsion from the club. Asked to prove his words, the young fellow did it so convincingly that even those with whom the culprit was a

favourite had no choice but to believe. Then Demetrius, in the hot-headed triumph of youth, never able to let well alone, must needs push his accusations a little further. In truth, he went beyond his mark, and so nearly labelled Prothero a coward as well as a cheat—which the man was not—that a little more plain speaking could have ended in only one way.

" To rob gentlemen in an arm-chair is a nice safe business ! " he cried. " If a poor wretch takes a purse in the street he's hanged for it ! "

" Do you mean to insinuate, Mr. Jordan," sneered Prothero, " that I shouldn't dare to—do what you so amiably suggest ? "

" I wager a hundred guineas you wouldn't ! " said the unthinking lad with a laugh.

" Done ! " cried Prothero, and sealed the wager with an oath. " I'll rob the Royal Mail and bring the booty here next Friday night."

Demetrius stood aghast. But it was too late to undo the mischief into which a lad's pride in his own rectitude had led him. He did, in truth, raise some objection, but was shouted down by the rest. And Prothero, seeking to reinstate a tottering reputation and scenting a considerable profit as well, refused to entertain the bare suggestion of an apology.

" No, gentleman," he said, not without a kind of sham dignity, " Mr. Jordan has been pleased to doubt my courage in a certain direction. It is for me to vindicate it by performing the act of daring of which he deems me incapable. After that, I may possibly put his to the proof in the usual way."

Demetrius left the club bitterly cursing his folly and writhing distractedly upon the horns of the dilemma whereon it had placed him. Any further attempt on his part to smooth over the ugly affair would be taken as a pusillanimous endeavour to save his own skin. At the same time, recollecting that he had, in effect, been guilty of inciting to a felony, he burnt with shame at the thought. He had neither love nor liking, nor esteem for Prothero by this time, yet he hated the knowledge that the man was incurring risk to himself as well as planning damage to others.

In despair, on the morning of the day when the attack on the coach was to be made he sent a letter to Prothero.

" For God's sake," it ran, " keep out of this risky business ! If it's money you're after, I'll find it somehow. If you still want your revenge after that, I'll meet you when and where you like."

To which Prothero replied ;

" You should have thought of that before. The challenged man has the choice of weapons, as you very well know. This, for the present, is mine. I'll spit you or blow your brains out later on."

It was apparent from this that Prothero was counting upon the nefarious feat to reinstate him at the club, the membership of which carried much advantage with it to a needy man in his equivocal walk in life. Demetrius, sick of the whole affair, felt that he could do no more.

" Damn him," he thought in his annoyance at the ungracious reception of his own overture, " here's a nice ending to a friendship ! There's one thing, though : he can call me out if he pleases, but he can't force me to raise a finger against him. I'll go to my grave with no man's blood on my soul."

The night of Prothero's attempt came on ; Demetrius was restless and uneasy all day. At night he walked the streets until the up coaches came in and the news began to spread that a daring attack had been made overnight upon the Royal Mail some five miles out of Dorchester. A successful attack, moreover, the highwaymen getting away with a large sum in money and valuables. Shorn of the glories of half a dozen masked men, lonely heaths, huge horse pistols, and all the traditional melodramatic touches, the story was circumstantial enough to convince Demetrius of two things : first, that Prothero ran the risk of being hanged, secondly, that he himself now owed the headstrong wretch a hundred guineas. As if these two facts were not unpleasant enough, he presently discovered a third wherewith to torment himself. It lay in the knowledge that a dozen or more of harmless people had suffered damage through his own initial folly. The only satisfaction in a bad business was that, apparently, the authorities had no clue to the thief.

Demetrius waited for a day or two, made inquiries at the club, and hoped every hour to receive some covert sign or message from Prothero. None came. At length it became clear that he was lying low, probably near the scene of the robbery, until it should be safe to make his way back to London. As the days passed, Demetrius's sense of responsibility led him to go in search of his late friend. Accordingly, he went down into Dorset, and after many delays and much trouble got upon Prothero's track in an isolated part of the county.

His final inquiries were made at a lonely farm-house standing in a hollow of the downs near to a lime-kiln. The man he was

seeking had taken refuge, it appeared, in a hay loft, where he was being carefully and secretly looked after by a dairymaid whose tender emotions he had evidently aroused for this purpose. When Demetrius, himself a handsome lad, had convinced the girl of his friendly intentions towards the fugitive, he was conducted to Prothero's hiding-place, and the two met once more.

This, their last meeting under existing conditions, was opened on Demetrius's side in an amicable spirit. But before half a dozen sentences had been exchanged he knew that Prothero's feeling towards him had not improved. Satisfied though the elder man was, both with his performance and its result, he was unreasonably savage over the discomforts which caution had since rendered necessary.

Demetrius bore awhile with the grumbling and abuse of himself which formed Prothero's greeting, and offered his services to his former friend in any way that he might suggest.

"There's nothing you can do," said Prothero in answer to that.

"Have you any money?" Demetrius asked then. He had brought with him as much as he had been able to raise at short notice in case the other needed monetary aid.

"Enough to spend in this cursed county of yours!" was the reply. "Damn the place! I never got any good out of it yet."

"That's probably your fault!" Demetrius retorted, his recent sympathy with his adversary beginning to evaporate in the man's presence. "However, I've nothing to do with your personal taste. Let's come to an understanding. I know I owe you a hundred guineas."

"Have you brought it with you?"

"No, I haven't," Demetrius answered, annoyed at the other's eagerness. "I've a little money of my own, but not a hundred guineas. And to speak plainly, I shouldn't pay it over to you now if I had."

"Oh! And why not?"

"Because in dealing with a gentleman like you I prefer witnesses, even in so private a matter as the payment of a debt of honour."

Prothero sneered.

"Very well," he said. "Then you can take yourself off, Master Baby-face. This is a man's business. You might burn your tender fingers."

Demetrius grew hot under the insolence. They were on the

verge of another quarrel, and he knew it. But he controlled his temper a little longer.

"There's one thing, Prothero, that I might do for you," he said. "Rather too risky a thing for you to attend to, and yet it may help you to have it seen to at once."

"What the devil are you talking about now?"

"The passengers' property. It ought to be returned to the coach owners as soon as possible. It may even stop the hue and cry that you've been complaining of."

For answer Prothero broke into a derisive laugh.

"What? Give up all I've risked my neck for?" he jeered. "Upon my damned soul you're a bigger fool than I took you for, Jordan! You ought to be out at nurse."

"Don't insult me, please. I'm trying to keep my temper——"

"Keep it or lose it, what do I care? After all, you're a trifle more amusing when you're in a rage. But understand once and for all that I don't intend to have you interfering in my affairs."

"But, confound it all, man, don't you see the difference between doing this thing for a wager—a jest as it were——"

"It was no jest on my part. 'Tis a mighty poor jest now."

"Yes—but I've pointed out to you that the return of the property will do a great deal to lessen inquiry. It's not a high standard of morality, but perhaps it's the view most likely to appeal to you."

"Oh, damn your morality!" cried Prothero. "D'ye want me to kick you down the ladder?"

"You'd better not try! But I insist upon those things being restored to their owners."

"Oh, go on insisting, if it amuses you. I can hear my Dorset charmer approaching with my supper. I won't ask you to share it. It might turn your stomach."

Demetrius, angry and a little sulky, stood back while Prothero walked to the entrance of the loft and remained there for some minutes in conversation with the girl. He caught a few words —"at the cross-roads," "midnight," "safety"—then the sound of a rustic kiss, after which Prothero stepped back into the loft, holding a basket and a lighted lantern. Taking no more notice of his companion, he spread out his supper on a bench, and pulling up a stool fell upon the food and liquor with an appetite.

Demetrius sat down upon a loose bundle of hay. As he did so, Prothero glanced up sharply. He was slicing a hunch of bread at the time and his divided attention resulted in a deep

gash across the wrist. His angry ejaculation brought Demetrius to his feet at the moment when he realized that the bed of hay was more solid than it should have been. Sympathy with physical pain was an impulse of his nature. He came forward at once.

" I'll tie it up for you," he said.

Prothero held out his hand. Demetrius bound it with his own handkerchief. The wound was bleeding freely, and some of the blood was smeared upon the wristband of the helper's shirt. As he tied the last knot he spoke again :

" Prothero, we used to be friends. I don't like your way, and I hate this business altogether. Will you think over what I have said ? I'll take the whole risk of returning the things."

" I've given you my answer," said the other.

" Well, so you think now ! I'll not hurry you. I'll stay here until to-morrow——"

" The devil you won't ! " cried Prothero, staring.

" I shall," declared Demetrius, and turned away with so determined an air that the other fell into silence.

Presently Prothero looked round.

" If you're set upon putting in the night here," he said ungraciously, " you may as well have a bit of supper, I suppose."

The lad was inclined to refuse, but thought better of it, and consented to share the bread and meat and cider which formed the humble fare.

Soon afterwards he found himself growing exceedingly sleepy, and lay down on the pile of hay.

" Hulloa, that's my bed ! " called Prothero. " You can lie down here."

Demetrius staggered across the loft and tumbled down on the floor. A sharp sound close to his ear momentarily aroused him.

" What's that ? " he asked.

" Nothing," answered Prothero. " I threw away a bottle; that's all."

Demetrius could see it lying near his resting-place. He began to wonder about it in a stupid way; to wonder hazily about many things . . . then he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was full day. And to his astonishment he was alone.

He sat up to consider this, and found himself staring into the face of the amorous milkmaid. The girl broke into a scream, dropping her platters broadcast.

" Where be en ? " she cried, fierce eyed and vigorous. " What hev 'ee done wi' my man ? "

" I don't know where he is," Demetrius told her. " I suppose he's gone outside."

" No, he han't—he'd never dare ! He twold I he'd meet me at cross-roads an' take me away wi' en. I waited, nigh to dawn in the cart, an' he never came."

" Well, I know nothing about it," said Demetrius. " He was here when I went to sleep. But I wouldn't break my heart for him if I were you. He's not worth it."

The girl burst into tears.

" You'm a crewel brute ! " she sobbed. " You've druv en away ! An' I loved en so dear ! "

" Well, no good could have come of that," Demetrius told her. " He'd never have loved you, you know."

" He did ! A' said he did ; crewel bad ! "

While they were speaking Demetrius was examining the pile of hay that Prothero had claimed overnight. He was not surprised to find that it now had the substantiality which might have been expected, and no more. With the discovery much became plain. Prothero had escaped with his booty during the night, and in order to be able to do so had drugged his companion's liquor. Demetrius picked up the bottle, examined it, and flung it down again.

How or why Prothero had missed the girl he did not pretend to know. Perhaps some one had detected his flight, and so forced him from his intended plans. Perhaps he had misled the girl all along. At any rate, his midnight departure with a fair-sized valise—and Demetrius knew that the object under the hay had been nothing less—stuffed full of stolen valuables, put an end to the young fellow's share in the business. Or so he supposed, little guessing that the ugliest part was still to come.

" Now, now," he said, having a young man's natural shyness in the presence of a woman's tears, " don't cry so. You'll soon forget all about him. Here, take this, and buy yourself something at the next fair."

The girl's eyes followed his hand sullenly. Suddenly she screamed, and pointed a finger at him.

" There's blood on 'ee ! " she gasped. " You've killed en ! "

This, the first homely expression of a charge which was subsequently hurled at him from the judicial bench, was so

preposterous as to seem trivial, even ridiculous. Demetrius laughed.

"You're talking nonsense!" he said, and again pressing the money on her—a circumstance afterwards brought up against him—he left the girl and went easily on his way. Much of his anxiety on Prothero's account was now removed, since it was plain that that social adventurer could be trusted to take care of himself.

Demetrius's next step was a visit to the neighbourhood of his old home. And it was here that the catastrophe overtook him with an unexpectedness which shook him to such an extent that his innocence gave but a poor account of itself. In truth, there was, or to his sense of honour there seemed to be, much about which his lips were necessarily closed. It was to his mind extremely probable that Prothero still lived. In which case, although his own danger was lessened, he felt the delicacy of his position the more, since a true and full explanation of his doings and circumstances could scarcely fail to incriminate his former friend as the robber of the coach. Therefore, he kept faith with the defaulter, made a bungle of the whole affair as far as himself was concerned by maintaining a reticence that went far to prejudice him in the eyes of the jury, and cut the ground from beneath his counsel's feet. He refused to explain either the errand which had brought him to the missing man or the cause of the quarrel which had been partially overheard by the girl—and, so refusing, passed to his final agony hoping to the last that Prothero, if he was above ground, would dare to come forward to save him.

When it became clear that such a consummation was not to be, and that—although Prothero's identity had been established by means of a case of unpaid bills found in the loft—none of the men in London intended to interest themselves on the prisoner's behalf by suggesting what appeared so probable to Demetrius himself; that the judge, an old enemy of his dead father, had set his face steadfastly against him; that, failing a suggestion from the outside, no one would be moved to think that the strange man seen at midnight thrusting a heavy load into the kiln was not himself disposing of Prothero's dead body, but his supposed victim in the flesh ridding himself of the valise which had held the stolen valuables—then Demetrius gave up hoping, summoned the courage that was in him, and thanked God that at least he had kept his father's name out of the mire.

Then came the day of execution, with its prolonged torture of delay and its final agony. An agony from which he passed, a wilted and blighted creature, into the harsh service of a master whom he endeavoured faithfully to obey ; to fall a second time a victim to the greed and evil instincts of the man who had raised no finger to save him ; to learn the joy of a pure and perfect love that should lead on to sacrifice ; to cast himself, in utter faith and humility, upon the bosom of his God.

. . . . . .

The grey light spread and filled the cell.

Demetrius lay sleeping so soundly that the noise of the opening door failed to arouse him. A hard-featured official touched his shoulder. Behind him stood others, all somewhat grey of face in the thin light.

" Come along," said the one—and his voice sounded hollow as though he spoke in an empty room—" there's a big crowd waiting for you."

Demetrius stood up. In his eyes there was the light of a great peace.

The chaplain pushed forward.

" One moment, please ! " he said, and addressed the prisoner. " Are you prepared to meet your God ? " he asked.

The answer came in a steady voice.

" I am prepared. But I should be grateful for a few moments for private prayer before I go out."

An assent was given. The chaplain, finding his services not required, stood back with an air of disapproval. Silence fell upon the group gathered at the door. Into the heart of that silence Demetrius prayed.

Not in words, articulate or unrevealed ; scarcely even in conscious thought. He bared his soul to his Maker in emotion alone, and in the darkness of his closed eyes found strength and refreshment in his ineffable need. Then he said :

" I am ready."

They closed around him, and led him from the cell.

XXXIX

JOSIAN

IN these days Josian Trehane repeatedly demanded with passionate intensity of her inner consciousness to know why she had been born.

That she herself was free from the attacks of Jermyn offered no emollient to the distress of her position. She had been freed at too great a cost. And she was powerless to refuse Demetrius's sacrifice—therein lay the core of pain and grief. By his own voluntary acceptance of the crime, as Sir John Trehane was careful to point out to her, the young man, her uncle's servant, had effectually prevented her bringing a charge against another man, no matter how convinced she might be in her own mind of the innocence of the one and of the guilt of the other.

"But," she pleaded passionately in the early days of her distress, "if I went into court and told my whole story, surely they would accept my evidence!"

"Evidence?" repeated her father. "You have none that a Court of Law would accept. What you suspect and believe is not evidence. Besides, as the case stands, you would not be heard. If, as it seems certain from what you tell me, the prisoner pleads Guilty at the Bar, formal evidence will be offered by the Prosecution to prove the commission of the crime, and he will then be condemned as a matter of course."

"Condemned! Condemned!" cried Josian. "They will sentence him without a trial at all?"

"You must remember that the position is of his own creating."

Josian pressed her hands to her forehead.

"They will sentence him without a trial!" she repeated. "I didn't know such cruel things could be done."

"It is the law," said the Home Secretary calmly.

"Then the law is wicked and unjust! Why don't you alter it?"

"You must be reasonable," said her father. "The matter does not rest with me. The law stands as it does—and there's an end."

"Reasonable!" moaned the distracted girl. "Good heavens, reasonable! There's no reason in your miserable law! Here's a man as innocent as you or I of this crime, and because he's noble enough and generous enough to wish to suffer for my sake the law forbids me to speak the words which would prove his innocence! And you tell me to be reasonable!"

Sir John Trehane looked at his daughter searchingly. She had told him nothing of Demetrius's undeclared tenderness for her or of her own for him. Nor had her father hitherto suspected this last. And now that some suggestion of the truth was revealed by reason of Josian's impassioned words he found the notion repugnant to him in the extreme.

It was not that he doubted the girl's story. That he believed implicitly. Nor was it altogether the fact, as he accepted it, of Demetrius's inferior birth, though that certainly added its quota to his prejudice. Behind that lay his own conviction that the half-frenzied visitor to him at the inn was a near relative of the unhappy victim of his own fatal dereliction of duty. All of which Trehane had no intention of explaining to his daughter.

He even forbore to question her particularly at this time; but, when presently she requested permission to visit Demetrius in the prison, he used his suspicion of the facts in order to deter her from a proceeding which was exceedingly against his wishes. He delicately insinuated what he felt would be an insuperable argument to the girl.

"But have you considered," he asked gently, "that such an interview would not only upset yourself, but be extremely painful to the young man as well? You see, he had placed himself in a very false position. But it is one which he evidently desires to maintain. He could not, therefore, in the presence of others—and others would be present—meet you as an innocent man, and surely you would not wish to put him to the pain of appearing before you, of all people, as a guilty one."

"But," pleaded Josian, wavering nevertheless, "I should know of his innocence."

Her father shook his head gravely.

"I cannot see that you have any right to add to the painfulness of his position."

Josian looked her father in the face.

" Very well," she said firmly. " I can be brave too. Not so brave as he. But he shall not suffer any pain that I can prevent. I will not see him ; I will write to him instead."

This point, after a moment's consideration, Trehane conceded, mentally reserving the right—which he afterwards exercised—of examining Josian's letter before despatching it. When she trustfully placed it in his hands, he advised her not to expect any answer from the prisoner, and privately perused what she had written. Her passionate outpouring, with its lack of reserve and barely concealed tenderness of expression, displeased her father's sense of propriety. Loath to press the situation further and, at the same time, determined not to forward the letter, he took the easiest course of destroying it unknown to the girl. Subsequent letters shared the same fate.

So far Trehane had scored an easy victory, and one which his class prejudices and his native sensitiveness alike approved. But the incident forewarned him of another and more important one to come.

For the next few weeks Josian troubled her father but little. He kept her with him, dreading that her distress might lead her into some impulsive act which he would disapprove. That she was beyond his understanding did not place her also beyond a certain half-unconscious sympathy. In these days he gave her more thought and attention than ever in her life before. Looking more closely at this elusive and alluring feminine creature who owed her existence to him, he was reminded of the dayspring of his own youth and love, by discovering traits which proved that he had not given her flesh and blood alone, but had endowed her with particular mental and spiritual qualities hitherto undiscerned, but which, in their revelation, all subtly feminized as they were, helped to make her the mysterious and attractive thing that she was.

In a word, Demetrius Matravers, sitting in the quiet corner of Dorchester Gaol, reading Barjona Furmedge's well-worn Bible and thinking of Josian Trehane, was still rendering her yeoman service by drawing more closely about her those ties of natural affection which she had never yet known.

The weeks dragged by to the time of the Autumn Assizes. Josian became very restless and sharp tempered. Against her will her father had carried her off to London. She grew pale and heavy eyed in the alien atmosphere. Trehane began to pity her, yet was powerless to suggest a remedy for her disease.

From time to time she passionately demanded his help. At length he told her that he had already done all that was possible. He had caused the self-accused prisoner to be privately examined with regard to his mental condition, and the report held out no hope of acquittal on those grounds.

Her father assured the weeping girl that should Demetrius signify at any time his intention of pleading Not Guilty at the trial he should have every possible advantage accorded to him. But Josian shook her head and took no comfort at all.

" He won't do that," she said.

And the attorney sent to interview the prisoner brought back an unfavourable report.

Nevertheless, the Home Secretary made preparations, and to the end that he might possibly aid the prisoner and be armed with counter-charges should Jermyn fulfil his threat against Josian he set about ascertaining what information he could respecting the man—about whom little appeared to be known.

Jermyn himself had disappeared. Drenchard was also missing. Neither of them had been seen since the day when part at least of Demetrius's story had been corroborated by an official visit to the Tower of the Winds and the identification of Robert Crumpler's body. This necessary duty had been performed on the same day that Demetrius had given himself up, and Jermyn, still lingering in the village with Drenchard kept firmly in tow, had then learned of the latest development. Finding the ground thus cut from beneath his feet and dreading the discovery of his second victim, who, dead or alive, was equally dangerous, he lost no time in putting as many miles as possible between himself and the scene of his crimes. Drenchard he dragged with him as an important precautionary measure.

It was not until the next day that Mrs. Summerhayes was discovered lying at the foot of the ladder that led to the gallery above the studio. At first the unfortunate woman was believed to be dead, but a medical examination proved that life was not extinct, although her condition was eminently serious. Removed to her own home, she lay there so dangerously ill and with so feeble a hold upon life that, had she ceased to draw breath, her seclusion from the outside world could not have been greater.

Her presence at the Tower being accounted for by Barjona Furmedge, it was no longer a matter of wonder or interest in the village. It was generally supposed that, being within the

wellnigh forbidden precincts, the lady had taken the opportunity of doing a little surreptitious exploring, and missing the steps in the dark had fallen from the ladder. From the first moment of her return to consciousness her medical attendant had forbidden those about her to question her upon the subject or to refer in any way to the tragedy at the Tower.

Thus it fell out that Sir John Trehane, in his tardy investigations, never came near the one who might have thrown some light upon them. Even Josian had no reason for personally connecting Mrs. Summerhayes with the man who had threatened herself. And as the time of the trial drew near, and Demetrius failed to avail himself of the opportunity to indicate a change of purpose, Trehane felt that he had done all that could be expected of him—perhaps even a little more.

By this time his sensibilities had suffered a severe shock. The alleged identity of his dead brother-in-law's servant with the criminal, Demetrius Jordan, whose untimely death, as he had supposed it to be, had caused him so much anxiety and mental distress, had reached him first as a rumour, which had disturbed him but slightly. For some time longer, until, in fact Demetrius's mental condition had been determined, he had serenely accepted the explanation which he had decided upon from the first. Either the morbidity which he believed he had detected in the young man had led him to assume the Christian name of his executed relative or it was a case of two members of the same family bearing the one name. In either event, the grim humour of the situation would be certain to commend itself to Robert Crumpler. But when Sir John received private and yet authoritative corroboration of the rumour he understood how easily the thing might have come about.

His first impulse was to acquaint Josian with his discovery in the hope of curing her distress by turning her interest into repugnance. But the girl was more than ever a mystery to him, and he could not be certain of the manner in which such a revelation would affect her. Moreover, at the back of his mind was a nervous disinclination to bring up once more the subject of the missing reprieve. Finally, he held his peace, but gave himself to the pursuit of his inquiries with regard to Jermyn with none the less sincerity of purpose. When these failed, he told himself that the man was lying low, awaiting the result of the trial in order, if possible, to renew his attacks upon Josian.

Had Trehane been less assured in his own mind of the hope-

lessness of Demetrius's present position, he would have suffered much on his daughter's account. As it was, he dared to make the only possible attempts on the prisoner's behalf more from his innate sense of justice than because he anticipated any good coming out of them.

When the trial was within sight, Josian pleaded to be allowed to attend. Trehane, having determined that she should not, was forced to an unworthy subterfuge. He purposely misinformed her as to the day of the trial, and kept her in ignorance of the result as long as possible. When he could do so no longer he bore her agonized reproaches with a calm face. He was patient with her, kind, fair-minded, but lacking in genuine sympathy.

"Oh, my God," cried Josian, when he had broken the tidings to her, "is there no way of saving him? Cannot you, who have so much power in these matters, do anything?"

Trehane gravely explained his position. He had already, as once before, endeavoured to win the consent of the presiding judge to the granting of a reprieve. On the former occasion he had gained his point with the utmost difficulty; on this, he failed to gain it at all. His lordship, made querulous by ill-health, refused to discuss the matter with an acerbity from which nothing could be hoped.

Something of all this Trehane now repeated to his daughter, sparing her the allusion to his former attempt.

"I must see him!" wailed the distracted girl. "I must see him once more! Father—sir! You will not refuse me that?"

"I would refuse you nothing that would help either you or the unhappy young man himself," Trehane replied with a touch of insincerity. "But I appeal to your reason."

"Reason!" cried Josian. "I've no reason left! There's no reason in all this bad business! If you will not take me, I'll go alone."

"And supposing your request were granted," pursued her father, "do you think that such an interview as you would make of it would be likely to render Jordan any more resigned to his fate?"

Josian shivered, but her eyes were rebellious still.

"Are you thinking of yourself, or of him?"

"Of both!" cried Josian.

"Of yourself, I fancy. Consider for a moment. Here is this young man who has been given a certain number of days in which to prepare for death. I am grieved to hurt you, my child,

but it is best to put the facts plainly before you. I want you to ask yourself whether he will be best able to do so by having his mind disturbed and agitated by innumerable painful emotions, or by being allowed to spend his last days in absolute detachment from the things of this world ? "

" Oh, I don't know, I don't know ! " wailed the storm-tossed girl. " I want to see him ; I must see him ! Oh, sir, for the last time ! For the last time ! "

" Think of him," said her father.

" I do ! I think of him all day and all night. But that's not enough ! I want to see him again ! "

" Think of him ! " repeated Trehane.

" Then," gasped Josian in her despair, " if I mayn't see him any more at least I must be near him ! I'll go to Dorchester."

" God forbid ! " exclaimed her father in dismay.

For he had not told her of the ghastly climax to the sentence, nor revealed the fact that it was to be carried out in two days' time.

He sought about for some means of both calming her mind and distracting it from its present alarming purpose. Then he made a tentative proposal.

" I will take you down to Bindon," he said, " if you do not think the associations will be too painful.

Josian calmed her tumultuous thoughts for the consideration of the idea. With a woman's instinctive grasping at any chance in the hope that the details will suggest themselves later, she surprised her father by a ready consent. Once so near the county town as Bindon, it would be hard indeed if she could not elude his watchfulness and get to Dorchester once more.

" That will do," said the unsuspicious Trehane. " We will go down to-morrow."

And on the morrow they went.

XL

HOW TREHANE RODE TO DORCHESTER

BINDON Abbey under weeping skies; Bindon, that place of ancient memories, where grey old Time itself had grown lichened and decrepit, where the past still brooded and the present seemed as yet unborn. Bindon in early winter, before the rigours of the season had set in, when hoar frost and snow had not yet set the seal of beauty to the naked branches and leaf-strewn ground; when a thin white mist drifted sadly among the noble timber, and by the very process of partial obliteration lent an added bulk to objects at a distance; when the stream had lifted itself to the level of its banks and flowed along heavy and full with a surfeit of rains; when loneliness became foreboding, and isolation took on the quality of despair; when dreariness turned to dread, and the moaning winds whispered of decay and of horror and of death.

Such was the aspect of the place when Josian Trehane came to it for the second time. Small wonder that she shuddered as her father's carriage was driven beneath the familiar gateway, or that her eyes rained as persistently as the heavens; smaller wonder still that Trehane himself, sitting stiffly at her side, wondered if he had acted with his usual judgment in bringing her here.

They arrived in the dusk of a November afternoon. Weather, hour and circumstances alike combined to increase the depression engendered by each. But to the weeping Josian there was in spite of her pain some satisfaction in the return. Whereas her father had none but gloomy and harassing associations to link him to this home of his dead brother-in-law, which, after Demetrius's death on the morrow, would pass in forfeiture to the Crown.

If the sodden park was dismal in the extreme, not much more could be said for the house itself when they entered it. Trehane had brought one or two servants with him, but even the active

ministrations of these failed to overcome the air of gloom and loneliness that hung over the rooms. No amount of bustle seemed to fill them with activity ; no fire imparted warmth to the damp chill of the atmosphere. Neither did the moving figures succeed in banishing the sense of solitariness which clung so heavily to Josian's mind.

No change had been made in the dwelling-house since Robert Crumpler's death. As far as outward appearances went Josian might have just returned from a walk down to the village. The studio door was closed and she would not enter it. But they dined in the living-room, and the old sculptor's tools and models still littered the mantelshelf, his heavy stick stood where Demetrius had placed it after his master's last journey to the village, a piece of her own needlework lay on a chair. Nothing and yet everything was changed. Had the fatal truth not been thrust with such terrible conviction into her heart, she could have looked to find her lost lover standing behind her chair, and to see his shapely hands moving about among the dishes, or have thought to raise her eyes to find Jermyn's insolent admiration flashing at her across her cousin's sulky face. When she wandered into the kitchen she could have stormed at her father's servants to find them eating and talking cheerfully on the hearth over which Demetrius had so often bent.

She went to her room early, going shudderingly past the closed studio door, and wondering how she had ever had the heart to laugh within these God-cursed walls. And a little bitter laugh broke from her at the thought of ever wanting to laugh again.

As soon as her footsteps sounded overhead her father, who was by now fairly regretting his weakness in allowing her to return to the Tower, took out a paper from his letter-case and opened it mechanically. There was no need for him to read it through again, for it contained only a few lines of writing and these he already knew by heart. It was dated from the county Gaol of Dorchester and ran :

" Sir,

" I have the honour to inform you that the execution of the prisoner, Demetrius Jordan, for murder will take place on Wednesday the 15 inst. at 8 o'clock a.m. A place will be reserved in accordance with your request."

He replaced the paper, rose from his seat and summoned his personal attendant.

" Have my horse brought round to-morrow morning at half-past six," he said.

The man asked whether his services would be required on the occasion. Trehane told him no ; he was riding out alone. He added a strict prohibition against any of the servants leaving the house the next day.

It was not a pleasant task that he had set himself. It was, in truth, one from which his sensitive nerves caused him to shrink somewhat. But now that it was certain that Demetrius Jordan could not escape death he had decided to be present to witness that death, in order that when Josian learned, as learn she must, of the tragic fact, he should be in a position to answer or to evade whatever questions she might be able to utter. In order that what to tell and what to leave untold should lie in the merciful discretion of a father and not be left to a stranger's vulgar appetite for the ghastly and unseemly.

There was even less sleep that night for Josian in her fire-lit room than for Demetrius in his narrow cell. Towards morning, while the light yet tarried and the mournfulness of the departing night hung heavily over all created things, at the hour when a merciful unconsciousness overcame the exhausted tenant of the prison house, an unbearable restlessness forced the girl from her pillow. Memories, desires, emotions rushed upon her ; crushed hopes arose. Her own vitality warred lustily against the thought of death. She looked out upon a still dark world and seemed to find in the melancholy attributes of a deadened universe the thing which she was fighting. No moon, no star ; as yet no sun. Only the incessant moaning of the wind, the rattling of her window-frame, the drip of the rain.

Suddenly, out of the confusion of her own vivid thoughts, an idea was born. With the rapid growth of all her sentiments, in a moment it was a resolve. With the next pulse-beat she was proceeding to carry it out.

Flinging a wrapper round her, her hair falling loose from its nightly twinings, she lit a candle and opened the door. As she did so, she caught the sound of a movement in her father's room, but the suggestion that he, too, was as wakeful as herself, acted only as a spur to her already hurried movements. She ran down the staircase as swiftly as the safety of her candle would allow.

At the door of the studio she did not falter now, but grasped the handle and, finding it unlocked, went in.

How poor a thing seemed her thin candle-ray to illumine the height and space that opened out before her! How dim and vast it looked—how ghastly and suggestive loomed the half-sculptured figures, the casts of detached limbs, the dismembered waxen heads and torsos! Had Josian's purpose been less sincere she would have fled in a panic of nervous repulsion from what appeared a veritable chamber of the dead. But she knew what she had come to see, and, avoiding the empty space where Robert Crumpler's bed had stood, pushed her way in among the trestles and casts and came to the spot where stood the unfinished model of the Prometheus.

Placing her candle on a bench she removed the long dry wrapping from the figure. It was stiff and heavy and fell in a cloud of dust to the floor. When this had settled again she lifted the candle and stood looking with mournful eyes at the imaged face of her beloved.

The likeness was a thing of wonder, and had the dead sculptor lived to complete the whole he might have pointed an exultant finger to this work as his masterpiece. Genius had inspired the conception, and genius had directed the execution of the design. The bowed head, the drooping pose of the body, suggested with the cunning of a master-hand the humanity of the man who would have made himself equal to the gods, not the humility of one whom the gods had punished. The face was sublime in its expression of agony heroically, even defiantly, endured; the noble reticence of the closed lips was matched by the dignity of the swelling throat and proudly pitiful droop of the half-veiled eyes. The thirst of physical suffering, weakness sinking into lassitude, yet held back from any open cry of pain, all had been powerfully and impressively reproduced by the ruthless old man who had striven first to create in his model of flesh and blood what he had then strengthened and idealized in the clay. For every suggestive line which he had wrought in the more plastic material, Demetrius had suffered some minor pressure of pain.

To Josian, as the flickering light gave some semblance of life to the agonized features, this was not a work of art, but merely the presentment of her lover's face, twisted and suffering, yet holding so fine a likeness to the calmer face which she knew and loved that as she looked a deadly horror seized her, and she

shook from head to feet. The awfulness of her thought sent her shivering back into the shadows, but still the suffering face stood out in the flickering rays and drew her back again. Reaching up her own warm fingers she caressed the immobile features, and kneeling on the bench pressed her lips upon the chilly clay.

Turning at length, her candle raised to guide her going, her glance fell upon the bust to which her own vivacious countenance had given birth. The contrast, as she saw it, between the agony of what she had just ceased to contemplate and the gay inconsequences of what attracted her present gaze was so painfully acute that a sudden hatred of the beautiful smiling thing, with its rippling hair and garland of summer flowers, sent her across to it in a heartbeat. Without a moment of reflection she grasped the bust by its delicate throat and hurled it from its pedestal to the floor. Even as it fell she seemed to hear again her uncle's feebly whispered words :

" For Demetrius ! Good lad. He's earned it."

What had she done ? For the instant her brain refused to be governed by existing circumstances, and she stood aghast at the thought that she had destroyed Demetrius's property. Then reason, cold and logical, checked her remorse. What did it matter ? Demetrius was to die. Should she weep because an impersonal crown had lost a treasure of its claiming ?

The bust lay broken on the floor—the smiling lips and perfect chin still preserved their contours intact, but the forehead and nose were cracked across, a gaping wound had destroyed one cheek, and the head had broken off at the neck. Pitiful, and yet ludicrous enough looked the dainty object now, with the odds and ends of paper which the old man had used to stuff inside the cavity protruding through the broken opening.

Josian, a little ashamed of her childish vehemence now that it had found expression in the ruin at her feet, stooped down to pick up the poor broken thing. When she lifted the base the stuffing, which had not been packed in very tightly, came away entire from the hollow of the head. She turned to lay it down.

Glancing carelessly at the compressed assortment of paper strips a fragment of writing caught her eyes : " Demetri——"

With shaking fingers, for she was highly enough strung this morning to be startled at anything, she detached this special fragment from the bundle in her hand and, partially unfolding it, read her lover's name.

At first a dim and confused idea took her that she was holding Robert Crumpler's will. Then once again reason released her mind from error, and, smoothing out the sheet of paper as she went, she moved across to where she had placed the candle and spread the crumpled document out in the light.

Her eyes became riveted upon the page.

Out of a wild confusion of thoughts and emotions, two truths leapt up at her from the written lines. One was merely surprising. The other amazed her indeed.

Two truths. The first, that this was the stolen reprieve. The second, that the man named within it was her lover, Demetrius Jordan.

She sank down overwhelmed. Thought stood still. Demetrius—he! What then had happened? That the reprieve had never been put to use was evidenced by the fact that it was still incomplete, even as her father had described it to her. Yet she had met him in the flesh, and learned to love him so. What had happened? He—Demetrius! Condemned to death as a murderer before she knew him! How could that be? She clasped her forehead, and stared blankly into the dimness, striving after coherent thought, pitfully aware of something, something at the back of her mind which she could not grasp, but upon which her very life seemed to depend.

Her life? No! His life! And with the calm emerging of that one thought others were set in order. Much that had perplexed and troubled her now assumed a cohesion and clarity that bade wonder cease. This, then, was the meaning of his reticence and humility; this was the reason of his cold shy ways, his submission to his master's tyranny; his silence; his solitariness. He had suffered this awful agony before his coming to her uncle's house; he knew himself to be an outcast, a marked man, one who had forfeited all the rights of freedom, of equality, of honour and of love. This, then, was the explanation of his tragic eyes, his whitened head, his loss of memory. These were the outward signs of mental stress and pain. He had suffered—ah, God, he had suffered—wrongfully then as wrongfully now—never for a moment had she a doubt of that!—and with the knowledge—for surely he had known!—that the previous agony had been keen enough to blanch his hair and to strike even the memory of itself from his mind, he had gone to face the tortures for the second time, uncomforted, alone—and had faced it for her sake!

Such a rush of emotion and passion of innocent love swept the girl to her feet, and drove her toward the door, even while the intellectual part of her was planning and reasoning out a daring scheme with all the logic force of which she was capable.

With the document clutched tightly in her shaking hand she caught the candle and hurried to the studio door. As she reached it, the topmost stair creaked, and looking up she presently saw her father, dressed for riding, coming down to the lower floor. At the same moment he became aware of her, a dim and shadowy figure with white upturned face and loosened hair revealed in the pale rays of candlelight.

"Father!"

She sprang forward, and thrust the recovered document beneath his eyes. Then, glancing up at him, she started back. Never had she seen him look so stern, so pale, so disapproving or calmly surprised.

"Josian! What are you doing here?"

"I could not sleep. I came down to the studio. I couldn't help it. I have found this."

She jerked out the sentences like a thing in pain. The paper wavered before his eyes. She clutched at the lowest baluster and the candle nearly fell from her hand.

"What is it?"

"The lost reprieve."

Trehane's hand shot out. His eyes gleamed in the yellow light. Josian snatched the paper away. Her father descended the remaining stairs and stood by her side.

"Let me see it! Give it to me, child!"

"No!"

"What do you mean? I order you to give it to me, Josian!"

"Not yet!" She faced him in the dimness, the everlasting feminine to mould the masculine to her will. "I want you to tell me a few things first."

Trehane glanced at his watch. He had a quarter of an hour to spare.

"I can give you ten minutes," he said. "No more. Important business takes me out early this morning."

"My business is more important still," rejoined the girl.

"As to that——" began Trehane, and closed his lips abruptly.

He crossed over to the living-room, bidding his daughter by a gesture to follow him. Inside the room he took the candle

from her, set the lighted wick to a couple more, and then turned on her with a question.

"Where did you find it?" he asked.

"Inside the wax bust that my uncle modelled from me."

"Inside the bust? God in heaven! What made the old man put it there?"

"I can tell you," said Josian. "When the bust was finished my uncle at first gave it to me."

"Ah!"

"You can see why. You had kept to your part of the bargain, and in his own queer way he intended to keep to his. That's clear, isn't it?"

Trehane considered for a moment. Then he said:

"No doubt your explanation is correct. But the fact of possession would not have benefited me, seeing that I should not have been aware of it."

"Of course! That is just the point that he would have enjoyed. You would have the reprieve without knowing it."

"Well! No doubt you have a just estimate of your uncle's character. But you suggested just now that he had altered his original intention."

"Yes; because he thought of a still better plan. He left the bust to one who had an even stronger right to the reprieve than you."

Trehane started slightly, recovered himself, and bade her go on. He was very pale, and the firm set of his lips had not relaxed.

"Sir, while my uncle lay ill he told me that the bust was to be given to his servant. He called him a good lad, and said that he had earned it. If he had had the chance, I think he would have told Demetrius to search inside."

Josian was watching her father over the flickering light. Outside, the world showed a finger of grey across its darkness.

"Do you know," asked the girl, "why Demetrius Jordan had the best right to that paper? You know must it, since it once passed through your hands."

Sir John Trehane bowed his head.

"I do know," he answered. "But I hoped to keep that knowledge from you."

Her quickened perceptions recognized his meaning, and her emotions were stirred anew.

"That was kind of you," she said. "Thank you, father."

"I wished to spare you, my child." Trehane held out his hand.

" Now give me the paper, my dear girl, and don't delay me any longer."

" A minute more, please ! You haven't told me anything yet."

" Be quick, then. What do you want to know ? "

" How did Demetrius escape that first time ? The reprieve was lost, and you told me that—that a man had died because of it."

" It is not a pleasant story. Please give me——"

" I want to know. My uncle boasted that he had bought him. Was that true ? "

" I believe so."

" Tell me the rest."

Trehane frowned impatiently.

" If you must know, then," he said, with a little hardening of his manner, " your uncle bought his body after execution in order to take a death-mask of the face. But the execution was execrably bungled, and the young man revived after his removal to this place. . . . I learnt this only recently, and I should not have told you, but for your express desire."

Josian had gone white and was clutching the ledge of the table, trembling from head to feet.

" Oh ! Oh ! " she gasped. " 'Tis worse, far worse, than I thought it was."

Her father, in his pity, attempted to rally her.

" Come, come," he urged kindly, " you must not let the affair affect you so painfully. The young man has behaved very nobly towards yourself, but you must not forget that he may have been guilty on that occasion."

" Guilty ! I could hate you for saying that ! " cried Josian with a sudden rousing of spirit, courage and determination. " I knew him ! You never did ! "

" I have no wish to argue the point," said her father quietly. He again took out his watch, assumed a more matter-of-fact air, and began to move towards the door. Josian stretched out her empty hand.

" You are hindering me from an important appointment," said her father. " Must I ask you again to give me that document ? "

Josian had now recovered herself. She faced her father with an air of determination as great as his own.

" The paper as it stands is worthless," she said.

" It is of importance to me."

" Yes ! Because you want to destroy the evidence of your own carelessness."

" Josian ! I forbid you to speak like that ! "

" But this paper mustn't be destroyed," Josian went on quickly. " Sit down, sir ; fill in the blanks, and make amends to Demetrius Jordan for the harm you did him five months ago ! "

The Home Secretary stared at her, caught her meaning, and stared afresh.

" Are you asking me to use that reprieve as though it was a newly drawn-up document ? " he said.

" Yes. It can be done. I have looked at it. It can be done easily. Is his lordship, in his present state of health, ever likely to hear of it, and deny that he had any part in this reprieve ? "

Trehane came back from the door ; hesitated, frowned ; walked to the door again.

" It is impossible," he said with stern lips. " You don't know what you are asking ! "

" Why is it impossible ? " asked Josian. She followed him to the door and caught at his arm. " Why is it impossible ? The Regent has already signed it. You have only to fill in the blanks, and Demetrius's life will be saved."

" It cannot be done. What you are asking me to do is tantamount to committing a forgery of the Royal Signature. I should be unworthy of the high position which I hold if I consented to treat that document as other than what it is—waste paper."

Josian slipped the hand that held the reprieve behind her back. Her beautiful eyes glowed warmly up at him, her mouth grew mocking, her whole expression daring in the last degree.

" Would His Majesty's Government regard it as waste paper ? " she asked. " If it's no more than that, why are you so anxious to get it back ? "

Trehane winced. The feminine point had pierced his harness of self-esteem and officialdom. For the moment he felt at this girl's mercy. The position was not a pleasant one. Then he recovered himself, and broke quietly through her guard.

" You threaten to produce that paper ? " he asked.

" I am sorry. You force me to threaten," she returned, unflinching.

" And you would bring ruin and disaster upon the father who is just learning to love you ? "

A sob broke from lips that mocked no longer. She did what she had never done yet; she flung herself on his breast and raised her tearful face to his.

"No," she said, "no. I don't threaten you. Because if you love me, there is no need for threats. You'll do what I ask; you'll save—the man I love!"

Trehane held her to him, felt her heart on his breast, her tears upon his hand. For a moment he was silent, forgetful even of the slow ticking of the clock outside and of the lifting darkness.

"Your uncle's servant," he said.

"The trustiest servant who ever lived!" she sobbed.

"A twice convicted murderer."

"An innocent man twice cruelly wronged!"

"Are you certain, my child?"

"He calls himself guilty now when you know that he is innocent. Why should you believe him guilty before because the world called him so?"

"That's very feminine reasoning, Josian," said Trehane, releasing her. "But in fairness to the young man I must admit that on the former occasion he maintained his innocence to the last and was convicted, in my opinion, upon insufficient evidence."

He seated himself at the table.

"Let me look at the paper," he said.

Josian drew near, trembling, doubtful.

"I give you my word not to destroy it without your permission. Well, keep your hold upon it, if you don't trust me."

Josian laid it on the table. With a nod of appreciation at her action, Sir John Trehane bent over it. A quivering silence fell between them. Into that silence came a sound—*clop-clop; clop-clop*—the slow and regular pacing of a horse's feet on the path outside. Trehane looked up. With one hand pressed upon the document he addressed his daughter. She was leaning over him, and her loosened hair swept the back of his hand. The minutes ticked away. Over at Dorchester Demetrius still slept, his moment not yet come.

Trehane spoke, clearly and steadily:

"Listen to me without interruption, please. The matter is a very grave one, and bristles with difficulties. And the time is too short as it is. But there are two or three points which you must clearly understand. The only one in our favour is the fact, which I learned yesterday at Dorchester, that his

lordship is dead. Now attend. First of all, this young fellow has been condemned to death on two separate charges, and we have here the means of saving him from the consequences of only one. If I were prepared openly to declare my negligence and to produce this document for what it is—an official reprieve which should have operated months ago—there would still remain this second self-constituted accusation. On the other hand, if I were to consent to commit the highly irregular act to which you urge me, it will be ruled that Demetrius Jordan has not yet fulfilled his former sentence. He would still be liable to be hanged. Do you see how the matter in this aspect stands ? "

" Yes," said Josian faintly. " But still—his life once saved, there would be the chance of his innocence being proved any day."

" The chance ? Yes. But a very poor one. On either count nothing has yet transpired, and there has been, one would say, plenty of time. And unless such a happy consummation came to pass do you realize the kind of life to which even a reprieve would condemn this unfortunate young man ? "

Josian said " No," and stared at her father wonderingly. So, in a few graphic words, to the accompaniment of the clock ticking in the passage and the horse pacing up and down before the door, he described to her something of the life of a transported convict. The girl's face quivered and her eyes darkened as she listened. But at the end of the recital she was still firm.

" You shall not frighten me in that way," she said. " It is a risk which must be faced. Save his life, and tell me of these horrors afterwards ! "

Her father bent his keen dark eyes upon her. He showed no impatience, only a grave earnestness.

" I have tried to point out that it may not be possible."

" It must be possible ! I'll not believe that it isn't ! They could never be so cruel, so barbarous, as to put him through that torture for the third time ! You have powerful friends, sir ; you have influence yourself. If that's all, I'll go to the Regent himself, I'll kneel to him, I'll implore him——"

Trehane raised his hands. The minutes were ticking away so fast now that a cold sweat covered his immobile face.

" Hush ! You cannot help us to a decision by talking so wildly," he said. " Give me one minute's silence, and let me think."

He bowed his head upon his hands. Josian watched him in a

fearful stillness. He was true to his word. No more than a minute had elapsed before he raised his face again. Looking at him now Josian was shocked and startled. In that short space of time a mental struggle had written itself in a blanched countenance streaked with quivering lines. In that short space of time the man had fought a temptation and had put it behind him for ever.

" Bring me a pen and ink."

She laid them before him.

Trehane began to write ; to fill in the blank spaces :

. . . Demetrius Jordan condemned to Death by Hanging after Trial at the Assizes at Dorchester, before one of His Majesty's Judges for the murder of——

So the order ran. Trehane's pen was poised over the space. And the name which he wrote was not that of Eustace Prothero, but of Robert Crumpler of Bindon, near Wool in Dorset.

Josian uttered a cry. Their eyes met.

" This will give him the best chance," said Trehane. " I am not choosing this way because it offers the greatest protection to myself ! "

Josian caught his disengaged hand and pressed it to her lips.

" I never thought that you were ! " she cried.

Three minutes later Trehane was in the saddle, his face grim and grey as he thought of the stiff ride before him over the country roads to Dorchester town.

The rain was falling in the darkness as, with his cloaked form bending low over his horse's neck and the reprieve lying safely in his letter-case, he turned away from the Abbey and got on to the road that he had once traversed in the reverse direction in the tranter's cart, with Demetrius Jordan lying white and still behind him. *Thud, thud ;* he was at the end of the lane, and the church clock struck the half-hour after seven as he turned into the high road.

A mad race, my masters ! A wild desperate race, O ye earthly judges of mankind who see but the surface of things, and, in human justice, must needs let the self-accused wretch abide by his spoken word ! A hard fierce race, with a dangling noose at one end and a passionate heart at the other ! A gasping, sweating race for horse and man in the lifting gloom and falling rain and chilly November wind ! A race on long empty roads, through silent villages, past lonely farm-steads and open heaths, by lanes and across meadows, through swelling streams and

quaking marshes—and always a race against a grey spectre with a length of Bridport hemp in its hands ; always a race lest a young face should be twisted in mortal agony for the second time, and the flower of a woman's love be broken before its perfume had made itself known.

The clouds lifted, the light slowly spread. Trehane's heart was pounding against his side as heavily and as regularly as his horse's hoofs struck the ground. God ! how light it grew. Did ever November morning before come up so swiftly, yet withal so wan and chill ? Was that a bell he could hear tolling ?—*ding-dong ; ding-dong !*—or was it merely a pulse throbbing in his own dizzy brain ? He scarcely knew. But he pressed on . . . and on . . . and on.

Then into the leaden gloom of the sky the roofs of Dorchester arose not half a mile away. He dragged out his watch and peered at it as he rode. Seven minutes to eight. He held it in his hand and kept his eyes upon it. A minute passed ; gone for ever. Six left ; five.

Thank God ! The town at last. But how great a crowd had gathered to see a fellow creature die ! It lay between him and the building that he must reach, spreading, a sea of heads all poised at different angles but all centred upon a certain point. Trehane, shouting as he rode, glanced fearfully in the same direction, and seeing an empty space shouted more lustily still.

Into that empty space a figure came, at sight of whom a great hush fell upon the multitude, and a not unpleasurable sense of expectation thrilled the waiting throng from side to side. But into that short silence Trehane flung one word, and at the cry of it the crowd parted before him and taking up the word tossed it farther and farther on and fell back at his advance, each upon each as his passage took him forward, so that he made a semi-royal progress of it to the very doors of the Gaol, as was the due of the man who rode on the King's business and came to save a human life.

He flung himself from his quivering horse and ran into the building.

" The Governor ! Where is the Governor ? "

The Governor was with the Sheriffs. Did his honour know that an execution was in progress ?

" I bring a reprieve ! Let me pass ! I am Sir John Trehane."

A moment later he was thrusting the document into the centre of a little group of grave-faced men, who eyed him with a

startled air. One of them, having glanced at the paper, hurried away.

"Am I in time? For God's sake! Am I in time?"

The Governor bowed his head.

"By a bare minute, Sir John," said he.

"Thank God!" breathed the exhausted man. Then, "Be gentle with him! For God's sake be gentle with him! For I greatly fear for his reason!"

He reached the scaffold in time to catch Demetrius as he fell.

XLI

AT WOOL

LATER that same day, but still before noon, Mrs. Summerhayes drew back the curtain of her window and looked out.

It was a heavy gloomy day, with falling rain and a nip of coming winter in the air. A day of infinite depressing possibilities to a woman in her weak state of health and with her poor outlook upon life. From her shrouded cottage no extensive view was obtainable, but the village as her circumscribed eyes now saw it appeared even quieter than usual. Nothing moved within the narrow boundary of her sight. A dull, incurious wonder stirred her idle thoughts, but her physical listlessness forbade keen mental process of any kind, and she soon turned wearily away.

As she did so, the sound of a falling hasp caught her ear, and another glance showed her the tranter coming up the garden path. It had been his habit during the time of her illness to make frequent inquiry after her and to bring her homely gifts of eggs and cream. He had some such offering in his hand now, and a listless interest moved her to call him in that she might thank him. With this intention she tapped on the pane, and Furmedge looked up.

The appearance of the man struck her oddly. It was true that she had not seen him since the day of Robert Crumpler's will-making, but it was hardly to be supposed that a few months' additional wear and tear of life could have wrought so great a change in him. He had spent too much time in the open air for his countenance to lose its russet hue through any other cause than that of ill-health. And that he had not been ill Mrs. Summerhayes very well knew. But his face was set in heavy lines, and was now turned towards her with unsmiling mouth and grave sad eyes. Moreover, he moved his limbs heavily and

came slouching up to the door, whereas he had hitherto walked with the briskness of a man ten years younger. Undoubtedly, something had happened to change and age the man.

When, a moment afterwards, he came into the lady's presence the same thing was apparent in his mode of greeting. He touched his forehead and then stood awkwardly before her, saying nothing. She was forced to speak to set him at his ease.

"You see, Furmedge, that I am better," she observed.

"So I do see, ma'am. And tar'ble glad and thankful I be to see it."

"Yes. I have had a long and wearisome illness. I doubt if I shall ever be the same woman again. Do you find me much changed, Furmedge?"

"Well, ma'am, since you put it so, I can't say as I don't."

"No wonder! 'Tis a marvel I have recovered so far. Life and all the interests and passions of life have passed me by. To all intents and purposes, Furmedge, I am a dead woman."

"Never say that, ma'am. The night cometh, when no man can wark, but while there's light left there's some'at for all our hands to do."

Mrs. Summerhayes smiled her old ironical smile.

"Not for me, I fancy. Even the most vital of my passions seems dead within my heart, since I must needs exert myself to gratify it. I hope nothing; I expect nothing; I desire nothing. My strength is gone; my life is a burden which I am ready to lay down at any time."

The tranter's face relaxed sufficiently to assume a shocked expression at her dolorous words.

"I'm sorry to hear ye spake like that, ma'am," he said.

She sighed softly, gazed awhile into the fire, then made an effort to rouse herself.

"You can sit down, Furmedge. Why do you reproach me? You yourself have changed."

"Nay, nay, ma'am."

"I think so. This is market day, is it not? Why aren't you at Dorchester this morning?"

A dull red crept over the tranter's gloomy face. He kept his eyes on the floor.

"Ah! There is some reason, then," Mrs. Summerhayes exclaimed. Some faint show of interest brightened her heavy eyes. "Tell it to me. It may amuse me and save my soul alive. What is it?"

"Nothen as med sarve to amuse ye, ma'am," stuttered Barjona in embarrassment.

"No matter! Let me, then, be thrilled—if that is possible! Or moved by the history of other woes than my own. Anything, anything, man, so that it will relieve this deadly load of apathy that weighs my soul to the ground. Come, speak out—shock me even, if you will! There is little, God knows, that I cannot bear!"

Against her half-mocking persuasions the homely diplomat had no chance. And, in truth, he was scarcely unwilling to unburden himself to some ready listener. He fidgeted awhile, raised and lowered his eyes, and at length blurted out:

"They'm hanging young 'Metrius Jordan over to the town to-day, an' I couldn't find it in my heart to go anigh the pleäce."

Mrs. Summerhayes' languid eyes expressed some interest. Clearly, she had had no suspicion of this.

"Ah, poor lad! They took him again, then?"

"Nay, ma'am; not that. He gave himself up."

"A very foolish young man! Surely he was safe at Mr. Crumpler's?"

"You don't un'erstand, Mrs. Summerhayes, ma'am. 'Twasn't for the wold affair at arl."

"For what then? Has he murdered anyone else?" Her light tone was reproached by a glance at her companion's brimming eyes. "Tell me!" she said more gently.

In a broken voice, with halting sentences, fumbling as it were with the story, he told her what he knew.

"An' 'tes in my mind," he cried, choking on the words, "that there's mwore in theäs than the lad meant any to know—that he'm so innercent o' theas sin as a' b'lieve en to be o' the first—an' I can't get it out o' my head as 'tis arl awrote in the letter as he made I swear not to open till a year'd gwone by. An' yet, for my oath's sake I didn't durst touch en, lest I'd be found false afore the Lard, and maybe only do the lad harm unbeknownst like. I do tell 'ee, ma'am, 'tes a crewel time I've a-had since that young feller give me the letter wi' the tears in his blue eyes and said his last good-bye! 'Twasn't a bloody murderer he looked, but more like holy Paul when a' parted from t'others on the seashore, and God A'mighty knows I sorrered too, like 'em, at his sayen that I'd see his feäce no mwore!"

Mrs. Summerhayes had listened in silence, the colour slowly flushing her thin cheek, her languid eyes gradually assuming

a wider intelligence and sympathy. As the tranter caught his breath on the last word and turned his head aside, she looked apprehensively at the clock.

" Is it over, do you think, by now ? " she asked.

The clock stood at noon. The tranter bent his head. Mrs. Summerhayes sighed.

" Then it is too late to save him," she said, and fell into silence awhile.

Presently Barjona showed his honest face—none the less honest because his eyes were red and glistening.

" A' reckon the lad's in the bosom o' his Saviour," he muttered.

" I'll leave that part of it to you," Mrs. Summerhayes rejoined with a touch of her dry cynicism. " But, at least, there is one thing I can do. I know nothing of his career in the next world, but I can clear his name in this one. You are quite right, Furmedge. From first to last, Demetrius Jordan was never a murderer. I say so because I know."

The tranter blinked his eyes and looked at her, instinctively feeling that there was a difference between her sense of assurance and his own.

" Well, ma'am," he said, " 'tes no more than I al'ays did think. But do 'ee mean as you know en to be innercent ? "

Mrs. Summerhayes clasped her knees, and again fell into silence. Then she said :

" Furmedge, I'll tell you what I have never yet told anyone. And I'll do it although there's much in it that you'll condemn me for."

" I hopes not, ma'am."

" I'm afraid 'tis so ! You're a religious man, and I make no pretence of being a religious woman. I have loved and I have hated, and both so violently that, as I said just now, the wells of my emotions are all dried up. I could hear of the death of a once beloved one, or let my greatest enemy go free, with equal indifference. But I was not always so."

" Do seem a tar'ble state to get into," muttered the tranter uneasily.

Mrs. Summerhayes laughed.

" Not so bad as you think ! " she said. " However, you're wondering what my emotions, or the lack of them, have to do with young Jordan. Well, I spoke the truth when I said that he was a stranger to me."

" Ah ! Yet you was friendly-like, ma'am ? "

" Very friendly. I thought, I believed, that he had done me a service."

" In what way, med I ask ? "

" I thought he had killed my husband. I loved him for that." The tranter sat aghast and staring. " Oh, you are properly shocked, aren't you ? Yes ; I had a husband once. A real legal husband. I was not the lost woman so many of my kind neighbours made me out to be. But he was a brute and I left him. I was always haunted by the fear that he would find me out and drag me back again. That's why I rejoiced when I heard of his death ; that's why I sent my woman to the prison with a word of blessing for the man who they said had killed him —a note wrapped in a handkerchief and thrust into his hand. That's why, when Demetrius Jordan cheated the gallows so adroitly, I offered him my friendship and gave him my esteem."

Barjona found words at last.

" An' did the lad know o' this, ma'am ? " he questioned.

" My reason ? Why, no ! That was my affair. I was never the one to turn my heart inside out for others to gaze at. He enjoyed my friendship ; what did the rest matter ? "

The tranter was remembering something. He eyed her in a curious way.

" You was onfriendly afterwards, wa'n't 'ee ? " he suggested.

" Yes. I despised, I nearly hated him. He had cheated me into a false security. My husband was not dead after all."

" Not dead ! How did 'ee find that out ? "

" He came here alive and well. He was the man who called himself Jermyn."

" Mr. Jermyn up to the Tower ? "

" The same."

" An' that "—the tranter's mind worked slowly under these revelations—" were why you was so onfriendly to the pore lad, were it ? Ah, ma'am, you hurt en sore."

" Did I ? Well, he had had an opportunity to win my freedom for me, apparently, or he would not have been accused, and he had neglected to use it. He had earned my contempt for that ! My interest in him was gone. But I had to account for my change of front, if not to him, to you. And so I tried to make you believe that I had found fresh proof of his guilt. Oh, I told you that there was much that you would condemn ! "

Barjona Furmedge sat twirling his hat by the brim, gazing

now at the fire, now furtively at the woman's face. At length his words stumbled out.

" 'Tesn't o' much account, a' reckon," he said, " what you did tell a pore ignorant chap like I. But, for God's sake, ma'am, why didn't 'ee spake out what 'ee knew, how as the man wa'n't dead after arl and save young Jardan from the thought of a sin as made his life a misery ? "

" I knew you would ask that," said Mrs. Summerhayes in cool reply. " If I had done that, I should have let my husband know that I was still alive and watching him. And I did not mean him to know these things until he had married Miss Trehane."

" But, Lard love 'ee, how could he do that, an' him a married man ? "

" Just so. How dull you are, Furmedge ! I wanted him to compromise himself—to put himself under the law. Then I should have stepped in and have had him punished."

" But—but the pore young leädy, ma'am ? "

" Miss Trehane ? Well, 'twould have been the price of her folly for loving him. But my plan failed utterly—he discovered me too soon, and did his best to kill me then and there."

" Ah ! " said the tranter with a long and comprehensive look at her colourless face and emaciated figure.

She bent forward, chin in palm, and stared into the glowing heart of the fire.

" You may wonder," she said, " why I have not found in this a revenge ready to my hand, and brought an accusation against the man. At one time I would have done so, but now I have been so near to death that even such a thought as that moves me only to a passing desire. Moreover, I should have probably failed. We were in the house alone, and I went there of my own free will. He was always too clever for me. And if I now speak openly of other things it is less from the desire of harming him than from a belated wish to serve the lad whom they have hanged to-day."

Furmedge looked round wonderingly.

" Hev ye got any mwore to tell ? " he asked.

" I think so. I don't pretend to understand young Jordan's motives for admitting the crime, but I fancy I can prove that he was not guilty."

" Good Lard, ma'am," groaned the tranter, " why didn't 'ee spake afore ? "

"Don't blame me in this!" she retorted with a faint suggestion of her old spirit. "You forget that I have only just heard of Mr. Crumpler's murder. I was aware of his death, but I had no special reason at the time to believe it other than a natural one. I was hiding from my husband in the gallery and saw something of what was going on, certainly. But the fact of Miss Trehane being brought to the bedside prevented any suspicion of foul play from entering my mind. And since then, I have asked no questions—I did not care to know—and nothing has been told me."

"But ye say as ye can clear en?" cried the tranter eagerly.

"I think so. I see a purpose, an evil purpose, in much that I hardly noticed before. There was some change of medicine; young Drenchard exhibited a degree of emotion at his stepfather's death which surprised me even then—it was fear, not sorrow, that moved him so strongly; my husband's inhuman ferocity, I can see now, was due to the same cause. He dreaded that I had seen and understood. I saw the fear in his face, but I didn't realize what it meant at the time. Jordan himself was not near the old man while I was in the gallery. And besides all this I can swear to having overheard Jermyn and Drenchard planning to rob Mr. Crumpler. They were in the old graveyard; I was in the road. The place seemed to fascinate me once I had found out that my husband was there. I went to watch, and that is what I heard."

"Why, ma'am, 'tes enough to hang the pair of 'em!" cried Barjona with conviction.

"I am not sure," returned the woman listlessly. Her interest in the affair seemed to have died out. "It might carry some weight if the unfortunate youth was still alive. As it is, it will merely give his friends, if he has any, the melancholy satisfaction of believing him not so guilty as he appeared to be. I confess that his attitude puzzles me a little. Can it be that Miss Trehane indeed loves my husband, that Jordan knew that, and has sacrificed himself to save the man for her sake?"

Barjona shook his head gloomily, and rose from his chair.

"It med be so, ma'am," he said. "A' reckon us'll never know till I opens that bit of paper as the lad give me. The maidy, she'm a flighty creatur', bless her pretty face, bein' young; an' 'twas plain to see as 'Metrius fair worshipped the bit o' earth she did set her dainty foot on—the pore lad!"

He sighed heavily, passed his sleeve across his eyes, and moved towards the door.

"I'll be getten along," he said, as Mrs. Summerhayes still brooded over the fire, not heeding him. "An' thou'lt not goo back from thy word to spake out, ma'am?"

"I'll not go back from my word," she repeated without moving.

"Thankye, thankye, for the dear bwoy's sake. He wer gentle born, a' reckon, an' I'm naught but a pore ignorant man, but we—well, 'tes no manner o' use in talken o' that! Good day to 'ee, Mrs. Summerhayes. An' if I med make no bwold, there's the Everlasten Arms awaiten to clasp 'ee whensoever ye're ready to gi' the word as 'twere."

She looked round at that, with the faint reflex of her old sarcastic smile lifting the corners of her lips.

"Oh, Barjona, Barjona," she gently scoffed, "it would need, I fear, the preaching of one risen from the dead—of Demetrius Jordan himself, perhaps—to make a Christian woman of me now!"

"What's impossible wi' men ben't impossible wi' God," answered the tranter, and went slowly away.

Looking back when he was half-way down the garden path he saw her still bending forward, motionless and brooding, with her listless eyes still turned to the heart of the glowing fire.

XLII

THE HILLSIDE

A MONTH later.

Jermyn cautiously opened the crazy door of the half ruined hut in which he and Drenchard were hiding, and looked out.

A thin fine mist enveloped the landscape, for the district was not far from the coast, and a Channel fog had drifted up during the night. It now lay across the distant heath, and swirled in a light wind among the naked boughs and trunks of this more wooded spot. For purposes of espionage it acted as an effective impediment; at the same time it offered a complete cover to anyone desiring to approach within half a mile.

Jermyn swore, closed the door viciously, and turned again to the interior of the hut.

It was a poor enough place, consisting of one small room with a covered-in yard at the back. The walls were of mud, broken and crumbling, the floor was of earth. But it possessed the remnants of a thatched roof and afforded a certain amount of shelter for the fugitives. A wide hearth occupied the side of one wall, an aperture, once a window, but now unglazed and shutterless, pierced that at right angles, opposite was the doorway, and on the fourth side the narrow opening, closed by a couple of rotting planks, that led to the yard beyond. By the side of the empty hearth Silas Drenchard lay sleeping.

Jermyn roused him with a kick.

"Get up!" he said.

Drenchard raised himself slowly, and got by degrees into a sitting position. From the floor he blinked at the other in the wan light.

"What is it?" he asked, sleepy and surly of speech.

"Nothing particular. I think we might risk a fire. There's a mist thick enough to hide the smoke."

"If you want a fire——" began the other.

"I do. And breakfast. Now, no nonsense, Sly. Get up and see to it, you lazy dog."

Drenchard rose, grumbling. Going into the back yard he collected a few sticks and under protest began to build a fire. When the flame caught he sat back on his heels and glanced up at his companion, who was looking on in moody silence.

"If you want a fire," he began again, "why the devil can't you make it yourself, instead of waking me just when I'd got to sleep?"

"Ah, that reminds me of something I wanted to say," said Jermyn with an unpleasant smile which set Drenchard shivering. "However, it can wait. Unpack the food while I have a wash. Then I'll talk to you."

He strolled off to the back premises, and soon Drenchard could hear him working the rusty winch of the well that stood there. He himself proceeded to unfasten a couple of saddle-bags and to examine the contents. The lighter of the two, that which was ostensibly Jermyn's property, held a few light household implements and personal requisites and a little ammunition. His own pack contained the heavier utensils and provisions. He scanned these last with a scowling face, which gradually lightened into an expression of low cunning. He crept to the upright boards that screened off the yard and peering cautiously through the chinks saw Jermyn, stripped to the waist, bending over a bucket of water. Drenchard returned to the saddle-bags, removed almost one-half of the remaining quantity of food and threw it at the back of the fire, covering it with lumps of peat. The rest of the provender he spread on the floor, and was waiting by the window when Jermyn came in. The elder man surveyed the meal with disrelish. The fire was smoking in excess and he dared not open the door. His temper, which had been growing viler every day, burst in a fit of rage over his companion. When he had done abusing the food, the weather, the circumstances and his companion, Drenchard spoke.

"Well, you won't have to grumble at your dinner," he said churlishly.

"How's that?" Jermyn spoke with the quick distrust of a man who suspects every one and everything about him.

"Because there won't be any!"

"That's a lie. I got enough to last for three days. The time's not run out, and we've been careful."

"Look for yourself, then!" snapped Drenchard.

Jermyn did so, and returned from his examination with a somewhat blank face. He shook his fist at his friend.

"That's you, you greedy dog!" he exclaimed. "You've been guzzling when I wasn't looking."

"Anyhow, it's gone," said Drenchard.

"Curse you, so I see! You deserve to go without a breakfast, you selfish brute!"

"I don't care. I'm not hungry. You won't have one to-morrow either, unless we pick up something."

"How the devil are we to pick up anything in this God-forsaken place? This damned county of yours is all moor and water!"

"Well," said Drenchard with a grin, "do you want lime-kilns?"

"Damn you! Matravers wouldn't have served me this trick. He was always a gentleman, and I believe you had a swineherd for a father."

"My family's as good as Matravers's. Don't go too far, Jermyn."

"Well," said the other, gnawing savagely at a crust, "I've no wish to quarrel. We've got to stick together, you and I."

"I know that," said Drenchard.

"Here! Eat, man, eat; or you'll be pretending to fall sick on my hands. I'll have to think over what's best to be done. . . . Lime-kilns? Ah! I had plenty of money on that journey. And you may wager your soul's salvation—if you can get anyone to accept such a doubtful stake!—that I had a good time while it lasted. Well, that's over and done with, and 'twas a bed o' roses compared with this. Certainly the last state is worse than the first in my unlucky case! . . . By the way, is there any more news about Matravers in that paper you were reading last night?"

At the question, which was plumped suddenly at him, Silas Drenchard started and reddened as at a verbal trap.

"I? I wasn't reading any paper," he stammered. "You've been dreaming, Jermy."

"No. I was wide-awake. A man can't go striking a light in the night-time without wakening his bedfellow, Sly. Your cursed flint and steel woke me for all your caution. I saw you reading a sheet of newspaper with a candle hidden under your coat. I naturally wondered where you got it. It seemed to interest you too."

" Oh, that ! " said Drenchard, frowning like a man recovering a random recollection. " I picked it up at the ale-house while you were buying the victuals. I couldn't sleep and so I thought I'd have a look at it to pass the time."

He answered with an air of sincerity which came all the more easily because so far he was telling the truth. But his ingenuousness did not turn his companion from the main issue.

" And kept it to yourself ! " he exclaimed in mock reproach. " That was just a little selfish of you, my Sly."

" There wasn't anything in it you'd have cared to know," Drenchard struck in hurriedly. " Only reports of markets and fairs."

" H'm ! That all ? Well, let's have a look all the same. When a poor devil's hiding for his life with a warrant out and all the county after him, and a companion he's none too sure of at his side, any sort of news comes as a relief from harassing thoughts. Hand it over ! "

Drenchard shivered, but made no sign of complying.

" I—I can't. I haven't got it now," he said.

" I don't believe you ! "

" I—I used it to kindle the fire ! "

" H'm ! I wonder ! " commented Jermyn, but he finished his meal without again referring to the matter.

Drenchard repacked the bags in sullen silence. Jermyn walked to the door and again surveyed the country-side. The fog had lifted a little, and as far as he could see not a creature was in view. Below, beneath a sloping shoulder of land and hidden from his sight, there lay, as he was aware, a village of some size.

While his back was turned Drenchard took the opportunity to carry out the next move in his recently conceived plan of action. Last night they had thrown a plank across a muddy patch on the floor. Jermyn was now standing at one extremity of the board, and would naturally walk along it when he turned round. With the rapid movement of an animal Drenchard stooped down and smeared the centre of the plank with a morsel of butter which he had secreted during the meal. He had scarcely hurried into the yard beyond before he heard the sound of a fall and a volley of curses. Looking back he saw Jermyn sprawling on the ground, and noticed with inward glee that when he sat up he was holding his ankle in his hand.

" Hulloa, what's up ? " he asked.

"Slipped on this cursed plank," groaned Jermyn. "Was there ever such cursed ill-luck? Here's my foot disabled when I may want the use of it at any moment!"

"That's bad! Much damage done?"

"It pains abominably!"

"Well," grinned Drenchard, "better your foot than your neck, eh?"

Jermyn was examining the injury. The foot had been twisted, and the tendons strained. He got up and limped to an improvised seat, where he remained for the rest of the day, fomenting the ankle and cursing Drenchard at intervals.

The hours passed heavily.

There was nothing to do, and the weather continued bad. By degrees both men fell into a morose silence. They were undisturbed, but the prospect as night again fell was depressing and unfavourable. The morning meal having been of the scantiest, hunger was presently added to the discomforts of their situation, and Jermyn swore anew.

"Are you sure there's nothing left?" he demanded at last.

"Not a scrap," said Drenchard, who welcomed his own biting pangs because he knew they were being reproduced in the other man.

"Perhaps we could get down to the village," suggested Jermyn.

"I could. You couldn't."

"With your help I might manage it."

"I'm not going to risk the open with you hanging on to me," Drenchard asserted with vigour.

"Then we'll starve together, my Sly!"

"Might as well be hanged, I think. It wouldn't be such a slow death."

"Ah! . . . I wonder how Matravers is getting on! Lucky devil! To think of his cheating the gallows a second time! The next thing'll be a Free Pardon for both offences, I suppose!"

"He's got it," said Drenchard incautiously. "And there's a rumour that Trehane's going to resign."

"Ah! indeed? Was that in your paper, Sly?"

"Yes—no—I don't think so. I heard 'em talking about it somewhere."

"And you can't find that paper?"

"I tell you I burnt it."

Later on Jermyn said:

" Starving's a rather painful process, Sly. I'm afraid I shall be forced to put you out of your misery by blowing your brains out, before I blow out my own."

As, from the first, Jermyn had maintained a close-fisted hold upon both pistols and ammunition, this was no empty threat. Drenchard rose with an oath.

" Oh, come on," he cried. " Let's get down to the village ! Only I warn you it's damned risky. Your limp will make you a marked man anywhere."

" No, it won't. It will be a fair disguise. There's nothing about a limp in the published description of me. What's the night like ? "

" Devilish dark, but the mist's blown off. Rather cold too."

" Well, lend me your arm, and remember that I've got a loaded pistol in t'other hand."

" I'm not likely to forget it. You've been holding it all day."

Before they emerged into the open air, Jermyn issued his final instructions.

" We're two befogged travellers on the heath," he said, " who've met with an accident. We've business in—oh, curse it, whatever town is near !—and must needs push on at once. How does that sound, Sly ? "

" Deuced lame, like yourself ! Any rustic will see through it, if the handbills have got so far."

" Think so ? Well, how's this ? I'm a famous London surgeon on my way to a case in the town. You're my assistant. We've had a breakdown, and need a vehicle and food for the road. Yes ! That will do. You leave the talking to me. Now we'll go forward. Hold hard ! Not so fast ! "

In silence, save for heavy breathing and muttered curses, they proceeded some twenty yards. The ground was uneven, and as the lights from the village were not visible from this point they had only their memories to guide them, and in this matter they soon began to differ.

" Bear more to the right ! " hissed Jermyn, who leant heavily on his companion's arm, and spoke like a man in pain.

" The village lies straight ahead," said Drenchard. " I remember noticing the church tower."

" Yes ; at a slant from the hut," Jermyn insisted, and his pistol clicked in the darkness.

" I'm trying to avoid the quagmire, you fool ! "

" I didn't know there was one."

" I know these parts better than you."

" Perhaps. Still, I'm certain you're going wrong now."

" Very well ! Find the way yourself, since you're so sure of it. I hunted this country before you ever set foot in Dorset."

" Hulloa ! Hulloa, Sly ! "

Drenchard had shaken off his companion's arm, and had slipped away in the darkness. The next moment he had dropped to his knees and a bullet flew over his head.

" Come back, you scoundrel ! " Jermyn cried as loudly as he dared. " I've got the other barrel loaded and my own barker as well ! "

Drenchard was unarmed, but he had two distinct advantages over Jermyn. As he had said, he had some knowledge of the country, and he had two sound legs to forward his flight. Without more alarm than served to throw him into a sweat in spite of the chill of the night air, he began to scramble off on hands and knees down the side of the hill. But now that he no longer had Jermyn hanging on to him he moved forward in the direction which the elder man had indicated, and in a few minutes saw the glimmer of distant lights ahead.

The night was still, and though he moved with the caution of life and death, some little sound of his progress came back to the deserted man, and drew him painfully onward in the other's wake. Once he raised his pistol arm, then let it fall to his side. The chance of hitting Drenchard in the dark was too vague, and he had wasted one bullet already. Two were left. He dared not risk the loss of these. So, one crawling several yards in advance, the other creeping with ever-increasing pain and rage after him, they approached by degrees the ledge from which the ground dropped abruptly to the road beneath. The fall was, at the point for which Drenchard was making, some thirty feet, but a foot-worn path led with no great inconvenience down to the level—if he could happen to strike it. Away to the left lay the quagmire of which he had spoken.

At length, reaching forward, his clutching fingers struck the empty air. He had come to the ledge, and finding the half-naked root of a tree, he gripped it with both hands and swung himself over. His feet slid along, he was thrown on to his back and though his progress was a stony one he was speedily precipitated at full length into the roadway. Once there, he scrambled on to his feet and set off running towards the village which was distant from this point half a mile.

Meanwhile, Jermyn on the hillside, had found less good fortune. Some few moments before Drenchard had reached the ledge the rooty nature of the ground had provided a pitfall for his less able feet. A townsman by birth and training, the wiles of the country-bred Drenchard had not suggested themselves to him. He had not thought of creeping along the ground, but had endeavoured throughout to follow in an upright position, although the twisted ankle frequently brought him to his knees with an oath and groan. At length a fall sent him sprawling with such effective results that he was unable to rise again. Not only was his injured ankle causing him considerable pain by reason of this fresh disaster, but his left arm had become disabled. He grew sick and faint, and in spite of the urgent need for movement in some direction or another found himself forced to lie awhile as he had fallen.

The night became full of strange sounds and lights. In his clearer moments he realized the illusion, and combated it with all his power. Setting his lips hard, he raised himself to a sitting posture, and waited awhile, leaning against the trunk of the tree the roots of which had brought him down. Presently he began to grope about at his side for the double-barrelled weapon that had fallen from his grasp. He found it at length, laid it across his knee, and waited. He was glad now that he had kept his two remaining bullets.

He knew that the end had come. But his mind was set that at least it should not be the end which Drenchard had planned. Two bullets left. He leant back, fighting his growing sense of sickness, and waited. "He's bound to come," he muttered, speaking aloud in order to concentrate his drifting thoughts. "They'll bring him along, right enough, for the identification. And he'll know he's coming to his death, damn him! . . . Serves me right for associating with such a miserable cur! Matravers was always a gentleman. Well, I can cheat the gallows, as well as he! . . . They'll bring him; and he'll know he's coming to his death. That'll make the King's Pardon he's sold me for seem a useless thing. Yes . . . they'll bring him. Soon . . . soon . . . soon . . ."

And in the chill and darkness, in his pain and weakness, this one desperate thought kept him conscious and alert, listening and waiting. Drenchard had always been a cowardly cur. They would bring him; and he would know that he was coming to his death . . . to his death. . . .

Lights pierced the darkness ; not the figment of a disordered brain, but genuine flashing lights from lanterns and flares. Sounds came to his dulled ear. He drew a deep gasping breath, and struggled to his knees.

And now as he knelt, leaning sideways against the trees, they burst in upon him, and closed round with a ring of light ; the yellow flares throwing long shifting shadows over broken ground and tangled growth. Long shadows and fierce flickering lights, but, to the man who in his last moments still found life salted by the narrow cynicism which he had turned upon all existing things, they alternately blotted out and revealed but the one face.

A voice rose, sharp with fear, quivering like the shadows on the ground :

" That's the man ! That's he ! Take him, and for God's sake let me get away ! "

Jermyn's lips writhed with inarticulate words. He rose deliberately to his feet, steadying himself against the tree.

" Too late, my Sly, too late ! "

Drenchard shrieked as the shot was fired. But when they raised him he was quiet enough.

A second shot rang out, and the night closed down once more.

XLIII

THE FINAL SERVICE

IT was not to be supposed that Demetrius Matravers could pass from the scaffold to the security of a King's Pardon and the beginning of a new life without an interim of severe mental and physical suffering.

Strained nerves and weakened health held him in Dorchester Gaol while his release was being officially substantiated, but as soon as his removal was practicable Sir John Trehane placed his house at Poole at his disposal, and took Josian away with himself to London. Another man would have remained to play the host, and would have allowed the convalescent the pleasure of the girl's society, but Trehane judged it better for the young man to recover his health and mental serenity undisturbed by any emotional experiences.

It was from the house at Poole that Demetrius, lapped in the soothing monotony of uneventful days, wrote to Trehane informing him of his true name and parentage, and as much of his previous history as it seemed necessary to impart. Trehane handed the letter to Josian, who made no comment on it. But at length she showed signs of extreme restlessness, and her father, whose tendered resignation—a matter of conscience alone—had not been accepted by the Government, quitted London and returned to Dorset, bringing Josian with him.

They arrived late at night, and it was not until the next morning that any conversation of a private nature was possible between any of the three.

The two men met at the breakfast table. Josian, who was as lively as a young puppy, put forward the fatigue of the journey as an excuse for not meeting Demetrius under her father's eyes. On the previous evening she had given him merely a formal greeting before hurrying to her room.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," said Trehane, fixing his keen dark eyes on his companion's face. "Very glad to

welcome you to what is, I suppose, the beginning of a new life for you. I need not say that I hope it will be a happy one."

Demetrius thanked him gravely, but seemed quiet and uncommunicative.

"Have you thought what you will do?" the elder man inquired. "For 'tis hardly to be supposed that you can take up your life precisely where it left off ten months ago."

"No. One never does that."

"Well," Trehane persisted a little impatiently, "perhaps you have thought of some plan—some ambition of your youth——"

He had been gazing at the whitened hair as he spoke—and the patch had widened considerably since the day when he had seen it first—but, lowering his eyes, he saw that the face beneath it, for all its gravity, was still the face of a very young man. He turned off his question with a slight laugh.

"I shall shock you, perhaps, sir, if I say that I have no ambition of the sort you mean," Demetrius replied with unsmiling earnestness.

Trehane leaned back in his chair, and continued to regard him carefully.

"On the whole, no!" he said. "Some allowance must be made, Mr. Matravers, after such experiences as yours. I beg pardon! Do I pain you by the allusion?"

"It is a foolish sensitiveness of which I must cure myself, Sir John. What were you going to say?"

"Only this. It is perfectly natural and legitimate for one so young as you still are, after your period of repression, to wish to enjoy life after the manner of other young men. I do not blame you at all. At the same time, when you have done enjoying yourself and are thinking of settling down, I shall be very glad to help you in any possible way."

Demetrius's mouth relaxed.

"You are very good, sir. But I don't think I need trouble you."

Trehane was slightly offended, and answered stiffly:

"You have other friends, perhaps?"

"Friends of my former life? They all deserted me when I needed them most. And at Mr. Crumpler's I had no opportunity of making friends—save one: and he, not the sort of man you would ask to your breakfast table, Sir John."

"Ah, you must drop him, of course. But you seem to have

some idea in your mind, and it is interest, not curiosity, that prompts me to ask what it is. You are a free man now, unbound in any way. You can do as you please with your life. But the advice of one who might very well be your father ought not to offend you, Mr. Matravers."

Demetrius looked up, meeting his host's regard with calm, untroubled eyes.

"I am sorry if I have seemed offended. Your interest is very welcome, I assure you. But, the truth is, I have decided where my path lies, and any man's advice is unnecessary, sir."

Trehane was far from pleased at this naïve independence; the less so because he was conscious of a growing liking for the speaker. His manner became a little distant, he put no further questions, but showed a pointed disposition to talk on indifferent topics.

Demetrius answered constrainedly, aware of the embarrassment which was hindering their friendly relations, and presently he returned to the personal subject.

"The truth is," he said frankly, "that although I have been released from Mr. Crumpler's service I find that I still have a master."

"For God's sake, explain what you mean!"

"I told you just now that I had no ambition in the ordinary sense. But, if I occupied the position which was once mine, I would set my hand to do some material good in the world. God knows there is much waiting to be done. Take our prisons; think how much they need reforming. I have seen one of them from the inside. There, I think, my work would lie, had I a free choice in the matter. But even if I accepted your offer of help it would be many years, if ever, before I had time or money enough for that. And, meanwhile, there is work within my reach."

"What sort of work?"

"My purpose, sir, is to carry the Gospel to those who, having heard it, have not yet understood."

"Ah! You intend to enter Orders?"

"No," said Demetrius, "I have no desire to perform ceremonies. I want to speak to the ignorant and careless. I can reach them more easily out of Orders."

The quiet dignity of his manner was a reproach to his companion, who was looking slightly scandalized. Demetrius stretched out his hand across the table. Trehane held the thin fingers

awhile. His irritation faded before the remembrance of the past. It was borne in upon him that he was dealing with one who had passed through an ordeal from which no man of any age could emerge unchanged, but which must inevitably leave him very pure or very ignoble—a saint or a reprobate. And looking and thinking thus he saw that there was about this lad no trace of fanaticism—only the deep sincerity of one to whom all worldly wisdom has ceased to have any meaning.

"I see," he said. "And the orthodox way does not appeal to you?"

"The orthodox way has little to do with my present feeling," Demetrius told him. "It was the words of an unlettered and ignorant man that gave me comfort when I needed it. And I ask myself, if he could do so much, whether I, with my advantages of education and intellect, yes, and experience, could not do a little more."

Trehane sat silent, encouraging Demetrius to say more. After a short pause, the young man went on:

"If you consider my position, sir, you will see why ambition, even of a not ignoble kind, can never be mine. I have borne, and still bear, the brand of a servant; I have worked at another man's bidding; I have been despised, mocked, beaten and bound. I have worn the chains of a felon, I have passed through the hangman's hands. And I am not yet twenty-five years old. Do you wonder that the ordinary impulses of youth mean nothing to me?"

Trehane sat silent, following a thought of his own. Presently he said:

"I do not wonder. No. I cannot wonder."

He rose and came round to the other side of the table.

"How do you mean to live?" he asked, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Very simply, Sir John. I shall let the Tower and live at the gatehouse."

"Will you not find that painful?"

"Possibly, at first. I must learn to bear it. If, as I said just now, things were different, I would turn the place into a College for Religious Training. As it is—I start a dairy farm."

"Have you the necessary capital?"

"My lawyers have been very generous, sir."

"Ah!" Trehane stood silent for a few moments. "Perhaps I shall not be guilty of a great breach of confidence if I tell you

what you are bound to know within a few days. His Majesty's Government intend to make a grant to you of two thousand pounds sterling, as compensation for the heavy injustice done to you, and your exceptional personal sufferings."

Demetrius sprang up.

"I know, sir, whom I have to thank for that!" he cried.

"Perhaps," said Trehane as their hands fell together again, "I also felt that I owed you a little reparation. You must accept the money as a nucleus for these more ambitious schemes of yours—which are, perhaps, not so impossible as you now think."

"I should like to believe it, sir," said Demetrius with glowing eyes.

"Well, well, time will surely show! And there's enough for the present of that. You would like, perhaps, to see my daughter?"

"With your permission, Sir John," answered Demetrius, after a slight pause. "I would not trouble her so soon after her journey," he added hastily, "only I must leave you to-day."

"To-day," repeated Trehane in genuine surprise. "Are you going back to Wool?"

"I am going first to my old home—to Court Matravers. I have an intense longing to see it again."

"Then go by all means," said Trehane a little tartly. "Though I hoped you would have stayed with us for a little while. You will find the house in the hands of the workmen, I believe," he added.

"Are the family away, sir?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering whether I might be able to get inside."

"I will give you an order, if you like, to do so."

"You, Sir John?"

"The property is mine. I bought it a month ago. It will be my gift to my daughter on her wedding-day."

Demetrius turned sharply to the window. But not before Trehane had caught a glimpse of his face. Presently he spoke without turning round.

"Miss Trehane is going to be married, then?" he asked.

"I think it is not improbable," replied her father, and, walking to the window, stood by Demetrius's side before the young man had time to smooth away the lines of pain from his face. "Something is troubling you, my dear Matravers. What is it?"

Again he laid his hand lightly on the drooping shoulder. Their eyes met.

"It is only a very natural envy," said Demetrius then, "of those men who have an unstained record to lay before the woman they love."

"Do you call yours a stained record, my boy?"

"It is not the one that a woman would desire in a lover or a husband. I don't blind myself to that fact. And sometimes the thought is very hard to bear."

"Do you mean that, if you loved——"

"If I loved," cried Demetrius with sudden passion that glowed the more convincingly because of his former self-control, "I should be only all the more conscious of all this. If I loved, I should know, in the depths of my own soul, that the love of such a man as I was too tainted and overshadowed by the past to be worthy the acceptance of one for whom I would willingly give my life!"

"I think," said Trehane, after a pause, during which Demetrius regained the mastery over himself with a distressed sense that he had said too much already, "that, if you loved, that would be a point for the woman, not for you, to decide. But, since the subject seems to pain you, we will say no more. . . . I will send my daughter to you in the next room."

Demetrius walked slowly across the floor, and laid his fingers on the handle of the door. Trehane spoke again from the window.

"We all know that humility is a Christian virtue, my dear Matravers. But there are times when it may do more harm than pride itself."

Demetrius opened the door with those words sounding in his ears. From the other side, Josian started back and had got barely half-way across the room before he entered it. She turned to meet him, glowing, yearning, indignant, embarrassed because she had been so nearly caught, all in a breath. And he, because he was wondering over Trehane's last words, weighing them up and down in his mind, testing them by his own code, came in slowly, and with a gravity of expression which even the sight of her did not immediately dispel.

"Demetrius!"

"Miss Trehane!"

Their hands and eyes met, hung together for a moment, and fell at the same time. The frankness, the encouragement, which

she had thrown into her greeting was frozen by the chill formality of his. She was hungering to feel his arms around her, his kisses on her lips, but she was hurt and angry as well, and could have chided him like a very shrew. What more could she do than she had done already? Was he to be her servant always—her lover never? While she asked herself these questions, Demetrius spoke.

"I am very glad to hear you call me that," he said. "I hope you will always think of me so."

She glanced quickly, hopefully at him, and saw that he was smiling. It came to her that she had never seen him smile before. For a moment he stood there in all the grace of the youthfulness that was his by rights, the very figure of a lover—but a lover who would not woo. For the next instant his smile faded, and she saw plainly the restraint which he was putting on his tongue. She caught up his last words hotly, and flung them back at him, half hoping that they would hurt, so grievously, so intolerably was he wounding her own yearning tenderness. And all the time that she mocked him with her words and looks she knew—and hugged the knowledge to herself—that if he had declared it his ambition to sweep a crossing before her father's office hers would have risen no higher than to stand at his side. "I hope you will always think of me so," he had said.

"Think of you so!" she retorted, her brilliant eyes flashing their light into the calm depths of his. "Indeed I shall not! Everything is changed, isn't it? I beg your pardon for addressing you so; I can't tell what made me do it! And never, never, never in this world shall I call you so again, Demetrius. I shall always think of you as a landed proprietor, who sells cream and butter—you're going to be a butter-man, aren't you, Demetrius? I heard you tell my father so. Yes; I heard. I was listening at the door. Aren't you properly shocked? It's not at all the sort of thing a self-respecting young woman ought to do, is it? But one can't always be respecting oneself; 'tis so dull and tiresome. And you're going back to the Tower—to sell the butter and cream. And sometimes you'll walk down to the village—down the long road where we walked together that night—you haven't forgotten that, I suppose?"

"No, Miss Trehane; I shall never forget that."

"I thought not! It was a horrid walk for both of us—but most of all for you!"

"Why specially for me?" he asked, bewildered by her delicate verbosity.

" Because it made your foot bleed ! I suppose you think I didn't care what happened to a man who was only—my servant ! "

" Miss Trehane ! "

Josian swung round to the window, and threw her next words at him without turning her head, so that she did not see the look of bewilderment that was deepening in his eyes.

" But I don't expect you'll think of all that when you get back to Bindon. Why should you ? You'll be very happy there, no doubt. You'll go to the village and talk to dear old Barjona—be sure you give him my love !—and you'll call upon that detestable Mrs. Summerhayes, and you'll come back to that great dismal house, and you'll sit down all nice and lonely—and —and—I'm sure I hope you'll be very happy and comfortable, Demetrius ! "

Demetrius's voice, not quite so steady now, came across her shoulder :

" I'm afraid I don't understand. I seem to have offended you, Miss Trehane."

The tears were in her eyes. She despised herself. Was this all she had to say to the man who had offered his life to save her from persecution, whose very presence made her shy and proud and happy and daring all at once—whom she yearned to take within her arms, while vowing to dedicate her own life to his happiness ? This flow of flippant talk, given when her lips were aching to confess her love ?

" And if you have offended me," she forced herself to say, still with her face turned from him, " haven't you a right to do so, after—after all that you have suffered for me ? It would be a pity to quarrel just as you are going away. You are going away, aren't you, Demetrius ? And if so, perhaps you had better go at once, before I quite hate myself ! "

He was standing behind her, she could feel his presence though there was no point of contact between them. Why had she not thanked him for his sacrifice—thanked him with her lips as well as in that poor passionate letter which should have told him everything, all the more because, as she knew well enough, it was lying at this moment on his heart ?

" Good-bye," said Demetrius, after a pause that had thrilled with unexpressed emotion.

" Oh, good-bye," she answered, and twisted her hand behind her to meet his. She dared not turn, for the tears were overflowing her eyes.

She felt her fingers grasped, held for an instant in a steady clasp, and relinquished slowly. She felt him move away.

The moment was more that she could bear. Careless of wet eyes and flushed cheeks, she turned round. The winter sunshine caught her and fell about her like a glory.

" Demetrius ! "

He looked back, half-way across the room. He paused. She saw his lips tremble upon her name, but he caught it back to his heart in passionate silence.

" Do you know that you owe me something, Demetrius ? Something that I gave to you once ; in the tranter's cart ; that last morning. Something that you have never repaid."

" In the tranter's cart—that last morning ? "

" Yes . . . Why don't you come nearer ? "

He advanced a step ; and again stood still.

" You were asleep. And I kissed you. On your lips. You never knew."

" You kissed me ? " Her heart bounded to meet his look, so joyous, so radiant, yet withal so bewildered, beneath his whitened hair. " You kissed me ? Why was that ? "

" I don't know. . . . But I don't think it could have been because I—didn't like you ! "

He came closer, stood before her with his hands stretched out.

" Josian ! Oh, Josian ! My love and my love ! Have you nothing more to say to me ? "

" And if I have," she murmured, " how can I possibly say it while you will persist in standing such a long way off ? "

Yet, when she lay within his arms, her head upon his shoulder and his kisses on her lips, her words were very few.

" Oh, Demetrius, Demetrius, you very Trusty Servant ! " was all she said.

THE END

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